E·KAZAKEVICH

THE HOUSE ON THE SQUARE

"A waxen idol standing beside a fire where pottery was being baked began to melt. 'Why are you so cruel to me,' the idol addressed the fire, 'to pottery you impart strength but me you destroy?' The fire replied, 'you have only your own nature to blame. I am always the same.' "

German professor Sebastian whom fate had thrown together with Sergei Lubentsov, the main hero of the novel, had done much thinking before he told the parable. The profoundly humane work of the Soviet commandant of the town of Lauterburg convinced the old scholar of the advantages of new relations between people. Sebastian realized the line between men did not necessarily coincide with the border line between states.

A war-time scout, Sergei Lubentsov wrote in his notebook on becoming commandant of the German town: "The commandant is always right, because he is backed by armed force. *That is why he must see to it that he is really always right.*" Like a purifying flame he is intent on melting the idols of time-hon-

oured prejudice, which stood in his way to the hearts of German people. His trust in man served as a beacon which lit up this laborious path.

* * *

The English reader has had the opportunity of reading three books by E. Kazakevich in English. These are: *Star*, *Spring on the Oder*, *Heart of a Friend*.

These novels form the basis of the soldier-writer's works. *House on the Square* is the logical sequel to *Spring on the Oder*. However, while *Spring on the Oder* deals with the Soviet Army's great victory over fascist Germany, *House on the Square* describes the victors "building peace," the day-to-day work of the Soviet Commandant's Office in Lauterburg.

This deep book reveals the author's thoughts on the destinies and fates of the peoples.

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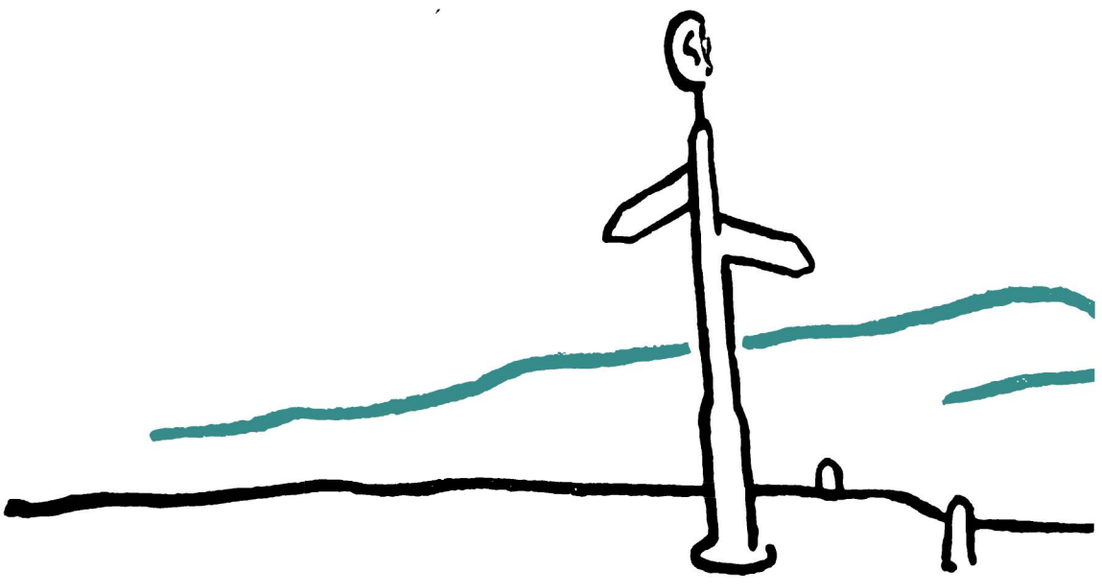

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
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Москва

E · KAZAKEVICH

THE HOUSE ON THE SQUARE

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

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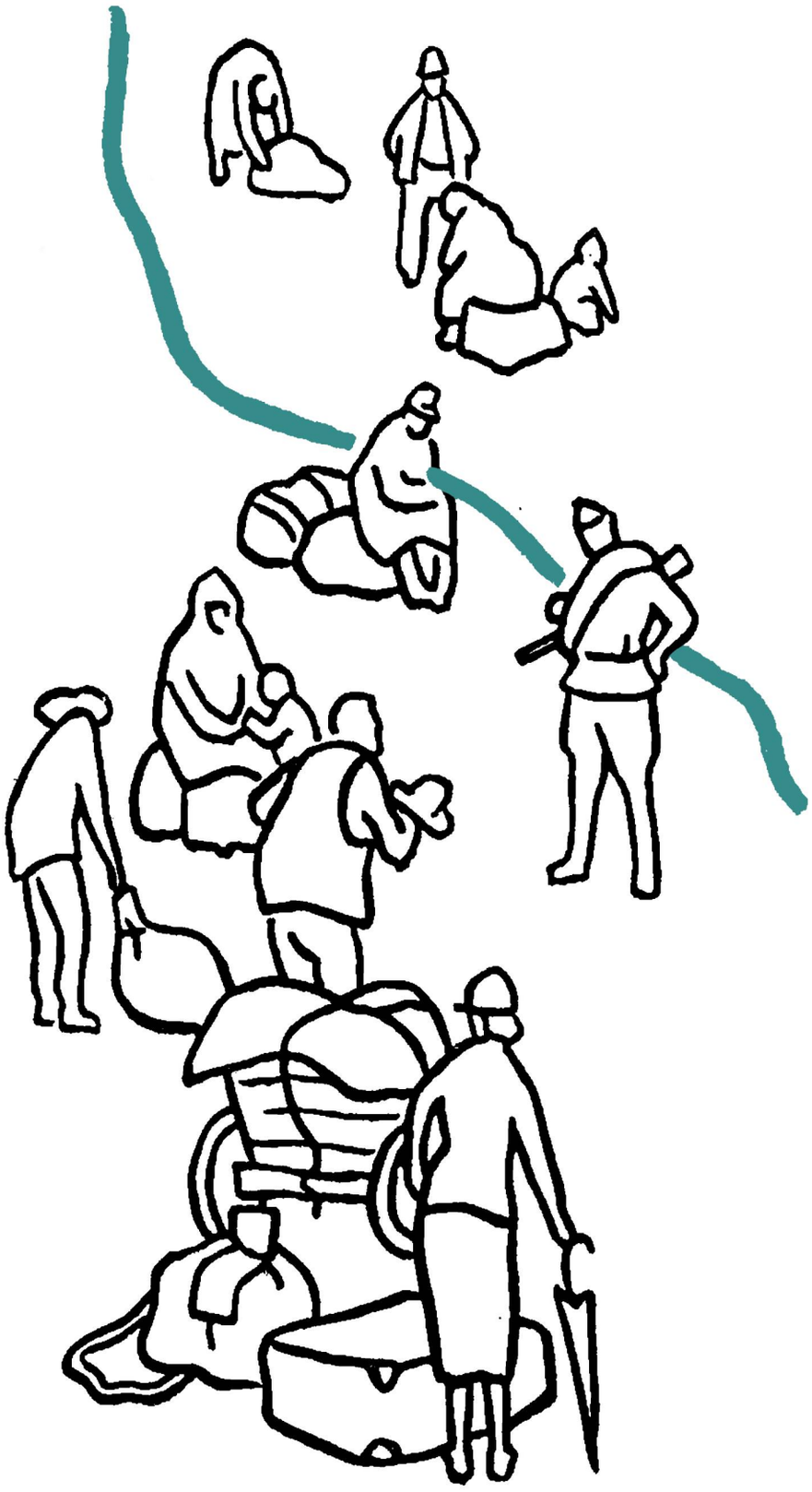
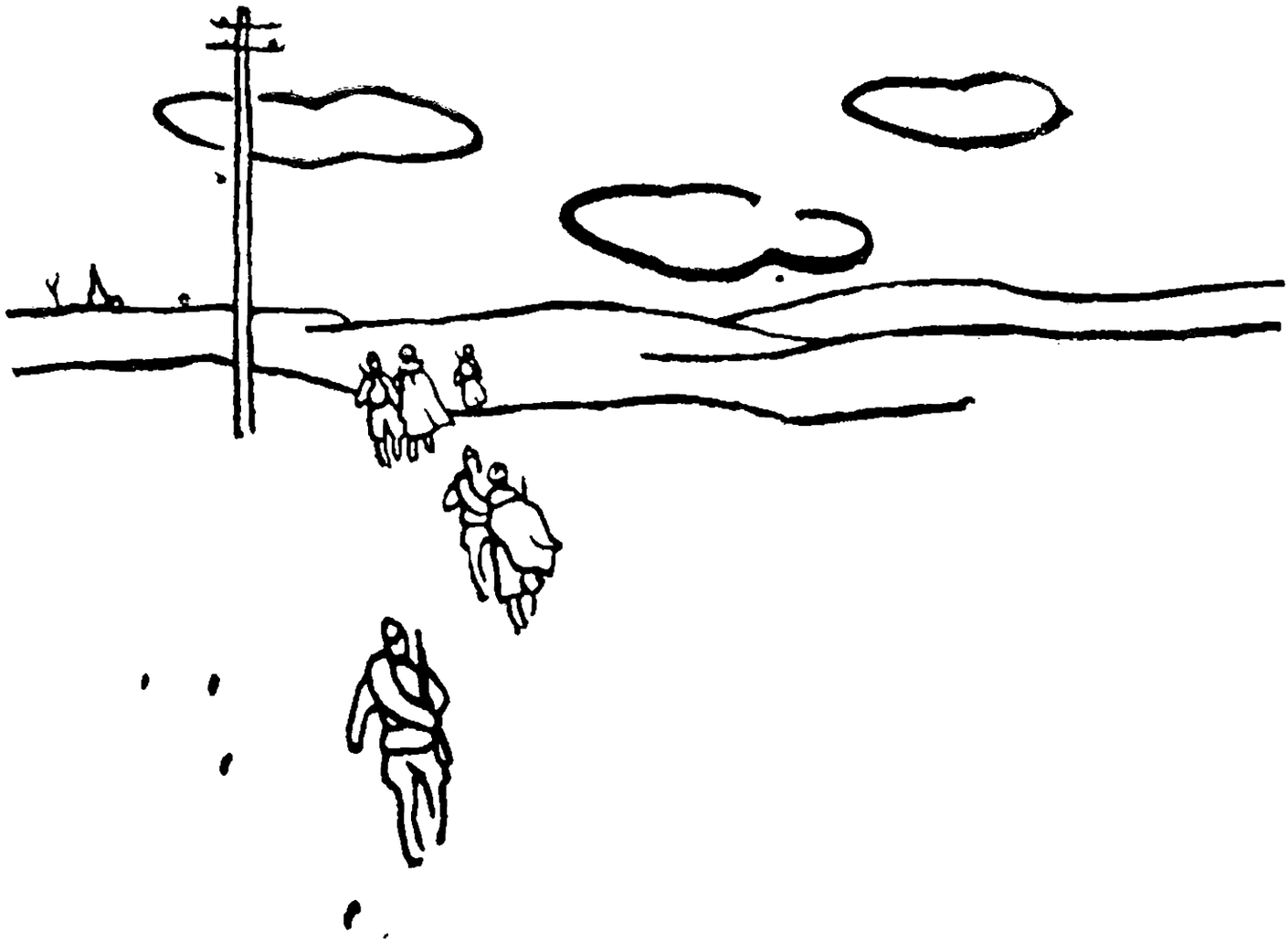
. . . Du hast nicht oft
Zu solchen edeln Tat Gelegenheit
Versagen kannst du's nicht;
Gewahr es bald.

"Iphigenie auf Tauris." Goethe.



PART ONE

Journey to the Harz



A detail of six soldiers was unhurriedly making its way westward. With the exception of the sergeant in charge, who despite his seniority in rank was the youngest in years, they were all middle-aged men. They belonged to the rear echelon of a front-line division and had been left behind to guard some stores of hay near Gomel where the division had

last been stationed before being moved to the front. Their instructions had been to wait for the convoy of lorries which the divisional quartermaster was to send as soon as the snow melted and the roads dried.

The hay was stacked up in bales in a small birch grove tinged purple by the swelling leaf-buds. The soldiers took turns on sentry duty as prescribed by regulations. They lived there too, in a dug-out they had made themselves. When their supplies ran out Sergeant Veretennikov went to Gomel to collect another ten days' rations of bread, sugar and tinned foods.

The birch grove stood in the midst of farm fields. It was spring, and the collective-farm women came out with their horses and ploughs. As they passed the birch grove, the women would exchange the time of day with the soldiers and cast covetous glances at the hay. Sometimes they asked for some, but the soldiers, guiltily avoiding their eyes, always refused.

"Can't do it," they would say. "Belongs to the army."

But they often helped the women with the ploughing, and there was understanding and sympathy between them.

Time passed, yet no lorries came from the division. Nothing disturbed the serene calm of the grove where the leaf-buds now burst into tiny tender green leaves. Veretennikov grew worried. He could not sleep, and at night he would slip out to the edge of the woods and peer at the road through the pitch-black darkness. The black-out was still enforced and not a pin-point of light was visible. The highway was too far away for traffic noises to be heard and the country road leading to the birch grove was deserted.

This strange inactivity got on Veretennikov's nerves, although such things were not at all unusual in the confusion of war-time. And when the women came round with the rumour that the Soviet armies were already in

Germany, if not practically in Berlin, he could not stand it any longer. Contrary to his habit of never asking for anything and doing only what he was ordered to do, he went to the commandant in Gomel and induced him to take over the hay and issue the necessary papers relieving the six of their charge and permitting them to proceed.

As soon as he got back, he told his men to get ready for the road.

By now Veretennikov had come to look upon this spot as home. Every path in the woods was as familiar to him as his own back-yard. The others too had grown accustomed to their life here; they had taken a liking to the place, acquired some modest possessions, and made friends with some of the local people. To part with all this was not as painful of course as parting with one's own home and family, but it was nevertheless a wrench. That evening, when the news that the friendly, unobtrusive guardians of the hay were leaving reached the collective farm, some of the women came over to see them. With them came the village school-teacher, a young woman named Sonya, who had formed a warm but undemonstrative affection for Veretennikov, which the sergeant returned.

Many were the reminiscences and stories that were exchanged in the course of that farewell evening around the camp-fire. Marfa Gerasimovna, the chairman of the collective farm, discovered that Private Petukhov had been a collective-farm team leader before the war, and they discussed farm problems, oblivious of the talk that went on round them—some of it gay, some sad, and some clumsily frivolous. One of the women had brought along a bottle of home-brew, and one after the other the soldiers drank out of the single glass, grunted and laid the glass down on the grass, while Veretennikov looked the other way.

In this small company of people thrown together by chance the same complex currents existed as you might find anywhere in the big world—the same momentary likes and dislikes, warm emotions and petty intrigues, hidden passions and ulterior motives.

When the time came to see the women back to the village, Veretennikov went with the others, leaving Petukhov behind to guard the hay. For a long time he and Sonya strolled up and down the village—if the rows of dug-out dwellings beside the burnt-out house sites could be called a village. On the way back to the birch grove his eye caught the fresh tracks of a cart and between them some stalks of hay gleaming in the moonlight, and he remembered that Marfa Gerasimovna had stayed behind with Petukhov when the others left. And he also remembered hearing the hurried squeaking of cart wheels in the distance.

He found Petukhov alone at the edge of the woods smoking a cigarette.

Veretennikov went on to the haystacks. Sure enough, several bales were missing. Coming back to Petukhov he looked sharply at the sentry's expressionless face, but said nothing. After all, the collective farm was also theirs, the sergeant told himself in an effort to appease his own conscience.

In the morning the lorries came for the hay. Veretennikov and his men left the birch grove and set out down the road.

After a while they picked up a ride in a lorry going their way; then they walked again, rode for a while in a cart and once more in a lorry. The first night was spent in a deserted hut on the roadside. Dawn saw them on their way again, and at noon they reached a railway station—a rude shack put up next to the ruins of the brick station building. Here they boarded a goods train bound for Brest.

The van they climbed into was half-filled with heavy slabs of asbestos. Gradually other passengers crowded in, among them several women in wadded jackets, an armless cripple, a few lads in work clothes and with the grim faces of adults, and two children, a boy and a girl, wearing torn, sodden boots. Each sat on his luggage which consisted of plywood boxes or cloth bundles.

Ages passed, but the train stood still as if the motionless wheels had stuck to the rails—indeed, it seemed there were no wheels at all, but iron blocks that were never intended to turn.

The little boy began to cry. He was shivering with cold. Private Atabekov pulled the youngster over to him, took off his wet boots and wrapped the child's feet in the folds of his greatcoat. Nebaba asked the girl, who was the older of the two, where they were bound. They were going for grain, she said. They had to go by themselves because their mother worked at a match factory. They were taking some things to exchange for the grain, the little girl explained. She could carry a whole pood quite easily, she said, and her brother could manage half a pood.

The train jerked into motion. Soon most of the passengers dozed off, only Atabekov and the boy continued talking in low voices. The boy was chewing a piece of bread.

"Why is there so much tobacco in your bread?" he asked.

"Shake it off, lad, shake it off," Atabekov whispered in reply.

The train stopped frequently. It was cold and uncomfortable, and the travellers felt sorry for themselves and their fellow-passengers.

"I'm never going to take a train again," Veretennikov declared when he got off at Brest in the morning.

The very name "Brest" reminded him of the first day of the war. He remembered how on that terrible Sunday,

when, as he later learned, Brest was already in flames, he and his comrades from the Ivanovo Melange Mills had gone for an outing in the country. He had been keeping company with a girl, and that very morning he finally discovered that she did not care for him. Until one o'clock in the afternoon when he learned from a passing cyclist that the war had broken out, he had thought himself the unhappiest man on earth. After that, young and inexperienced though he was, he knew nothing mattered now except the war.

Near a bridge across the Bug an army lorry laden with summer equipment for the front-line troops picked up the six men. The driver regaled Veretennikov with stories about his home life; his stepmother ill-treated his wife, and although he had tried not to think about it while he was in the army, he could see that he would have to build a house of his own. And he set to figuring out what it would all come to, and wondered where he would get the timber, for that was a problem in the steppe beyond the Volga where he came from.

The lorry drove on over the rolling Polish plain. The soldiers, although they surveyed with keen interest the unfamiliar landscape slipping past, talked mostly of things back home. The end of the war was in the air, and in their hearts they longed to be going not forward, as they had till now, but back to the homes and families they had left behind. At the same time they were anxious to reach their regiment, for they realized that the road home passed through the front lines. And so, bound for home far in the East, they were moving westward. Indeed, had they been told that in order to get home they had to circle the world, they would have done so without a murmur, on foot or by picking up rides in passing lorries, in action against the enemy or in rear echelons, it didn't matter which.

It was very comfortable riding on the soft bales of

uniforms. But they had to find out where their division was stationed, and so they parted with the lorry driver in a Polish town and set out to look for the Soviet military commandant's office. Veretennikov went up to a Pole in a tall hat and asked the way, but instead of an answer, the man gave them a mocking, hostile glance from the corner of his eye and continued on his way as if they did not exist.

From this Nebaba jumped to the conclusion that the "Poles do not like us" and that "the leopard cannot change its spots," and suggested that Veretennikov ask another passer-by who looked like a worker. However, Veretennikov's curiosity was roused and he decided to verify his first impressions by addressing someone who was obviously not a worker—a man of very stiff and dignified bearing and extremely polite, judging by the sweeping gesture with which in spite of the rain he doffed his hat to acquaintances, of whom he seemed to have a great many.

He raised his hat to Veretennikov too when the sergeant addressed him and stood bare-headed listening with close attention. He gave the most detailed instructions how to get to the commandant's office, and even accompanied the soldiers as far as the corner to show them the way. The soldiers came to the conclusion that life was far more complex than Nebaba seemed to think, and that if one could distinguish friends and enemies by their headgear, life would be very much simpler.

In the commandant's office they learned that the front lines were so far away to the West that no one could tell exactly where they were. The only advice they got was to keep going westward.

After spending the night in the office premises, the six were on the road again early next morning. The town was still asleep. The first signs of life were just beginning to appear in the tiny shops and courtyards, and

here and there the tousled heads of women peeped out of windows. The grey pall of early-morning mist hid the sky, but it soon cleared and once again the sky was blue. The highway rolled on and disappeared among the hills. Birds twittered in the roadside trees. And behind the backs of the six an enormous sun climbed over the horizon, casting their shadows before them—long, queer-shaped shadows that all but reached to the sky-line. Then the shadows dwindled, the air grew warmer and the men's spirits rose higher and higher.

Presently they overtook a crowd of refugees, men, women and children, walking along the roadside, their meagre belongings loaded on wheelbarrows and bicycles. For some twenty minutes the soldiers walked beside them, but never with them, for they and the refugees were worlds apart. Then the six stopped in the shade of some trees to eat, and the others went ahead. Some time later the soldiers passed them camped in a copse near the road, also having their breakfast. None of the six had slept much the previous night and they decided to stop somewhere for a nap. They turned off the road but could find no suitable spot in the immediate vicinity—it was all aspen woods and the ground was wet. About half a kilometre ahead, however, a few pines grew on a bit of high ground—you could see it was sandy by the landslips on the steep slope—and they headed for it. Throwing themselves down on the sun-warmed grass between the trees, they were soon fast asleep. They awoke some time later to find the refugees camped nearby. That they were the same refugees the soldiers knew when they saw a little girl with flaming red hair darting in and out among the trees. They had noticed the girl the first time they passed the group, for you didn't find hair that colour so often.

Zuyev, whose boy back in Arkhangelsk region had a mop of hair of a similarly fiery shade, went over and

watched the girl for some time. She wandered about the camp, casting hungry glances at pots boiling here and there over small camp-fires, quarrelling with other children, now pushing some little boy, now pulling another girl's hair, and then running for cover behind the trees only to appear the next moment at the other end of the camp.

Zuyev smiled as he followed her antics. Suddenly he became conscious of the voices of some men and women sitting nearby. His eyes grew round with surprise and he hurried back to his comrades.

"They're Germans!" he said.

The soldiers were amazed. Until then all Germans to them had been hard, cruel men armed to the teeth. They went closer to the camp. And the longer they stood there watching, the clearer they saw that being Germans did not prevent these people from being ordinary humans, men and women, old and young. They watched the Germans cook a thin soup consisting mainly of water with a handful of coarse dark flour thrown in—a soup that was familiar enough to Russians throughout the vast hinterland. The low conversation, the wailing of the little children and the shouts of the older ones, the desperation written on the faces of the mothers and the dumb resignation of the men—all this too was painfully familiar.

Was it hatred the soldiers felt? No, their eyes expressed distrust, suspicion, wonder, but not hatred. Had they entered German territory in the heat of battle as the forward units had, it might have been otherwise. But as it was, they felt no hostility towards these wretched, homeless men and women who were tramping the roads just as they were doing.

Veretennikov went up to the nearest couple and asked them where they were going. The man replied in a mixture of Polish and German that they were refugees from

Silesia and had no destination; they would stop where they were told to stop. The woman burst into tears. The soldiers shook their heads, and since there was nothing they could do to help, they went back to their kits and got ready to take to the road again.

The Germans too picked up their possessions and moved on. For some time the two groups walked side by side, but then the refugees lagged behind. Suddenly a desperate screaming rent the air. Zuyev turned back and saw a tall, bony, unshaven, red-haired German beating the little red-headed girl; he held her with his left hand and was lashing her back and bare legs with a switch held in his right; a small pale woman stood by wringing her hands and weeping. But the man paid no heed until Zuyev gave him a push from behind. Then he let the child go, dropped the switch, and stood there limp and wretched.

"Here, stop that!" said Zuyev.

He was fuming when he rejoined his comrades. His anger was genuine, though he himself had thought little of thrashing his own son. To see someone else do it was far worse. Besides, here the beating had been administered to a girl. Nevertheless, Zuyev, brushing away a tear, vowed to himself never to raise his hand against his son again.

"What's happened to all the lorries on this road?" he broke out irritably.

Soon, however, they were able to pick up a lift, but not for long. The lorries swung off the main highway, and the six jumped off when they slowed down for the turn. To save time the soldiers decided not to wait for other lorries, but plodded on towards the sunset. It was a glorious sunset, its banners flung boldly across the sky, with crimson streaks on the horizon that made the men think of the front. They already imagined they heard the sound of firing somewhere in the distance—no, it was

not their imagination; there was *shooting down the road, evidently in the vicinity of the lorries standing some distance ahead. Veretennikov sighed deeply at the thought that they were in it again. He slipped his rifle off his shoulder, moved over into the roadside ditch and crouching low pushed on towards the standing lorries. When he got close enough he saw that the lorries were full of Soviet soldiers and they were all firing into the air. Veretennikov looked up too, expecting to see an enemy aircraft in the darkening sky, but there was nothing in sight. The men in the lorries, however, continued firing and shouting. Petukhov was the first to realize what it meant.*

"The war's over," he said with a tremor in his voice and sat down on the grass.

To the others too this seemed the natural thing to do and they followed suit. Only Veretennikov remained standing. He was torn between a desire to throw his arms around everyone within reach and give vent to his feelings in a flood of words, and an impulse to crawl away into the solitude of the forest and hide himself there for days on end.

1

Everything stopped. At first it seemed as if time itself had come to a standstill, so accustomed were these men to movement, constant change of scenery, the urge to press forward to new, unknown parts. Time had become so merged with space that minutes, hours, days and weeks seemed nothing but another measure of distance. But now the hours slipped by and the days and weeks passed without any spatial change. To adapt oneself to this new condition was a slow process, for the eye could not get accustomed to the lack of kaleidoscopic movement,

or the heart settle down to a normal rhythm of life after a supertension that had lasted so long.

Captain Chokhov woke up one summer morning, in a soft bed. He had been dreaming that he was charging some nameless, snow-covered hill and shouting till he was hoarse. Shells exploded all round, the snow melted with a sizzling sound on the hot rim of a fresh crater, and someone groaned nearby. It had all been so vivid, the men's faces so pale and tense, the chill constriction of the heart so real—in a word, all his emotions and his sense of time and space had been so true to life that when he opened his eyes and found himself between warm, clean sheets he had no idea where he was. To top it all, a clock somewhere struck the hour with a pure, melodious chime. Chokhov decided he was dead.

But even after he remembered that he was in the German city of Wittenberg on the Elbe, and that it was nearly two months since the war had ended, he could not rid himself of a vague sense of alarm. Gradually the cause of this disquietude registered in his brain: today he was to turn over his command. The whole division, and perhaps even the corps to which it belonged, was being disbanded. The older soldiers were going home, the younger ones were being transferred to other units, and the officers were to appear before special commissions which would decide whether to demobilize them or leave them in the service.

Chokhov did not have the slightest idea what he would do if he were demobilized. The very thought of life out of the army was unendurable to him. Though he had tended to be too independent, too self-confident perhaps in the customary army environment, he trembled at the thought of being left to fend for himself in civilian life. To have to make decisions—to choose where to go, and what to do, and to find his own place in life—all this

frightened him. He longed for the strict routine of army life and the inflexibility of service regulations which had so often irked him before. How much simpler it was to carry out orders than to have to plan one's own life!

Years of war separated him from civilian life; besides, he had been too young before the war to have had time to savour it properly. And he thought with a touch of distaste not unmixed with awe about the prospect of having to provide himself with clothes, living quarters and work, of having to get the flat tidied up and the laundry attended to.

What had he, Captain Chokhov, learned during the war? What could he do? What did he know? He knew how to command a company, to make men obey him. He knew exactly what infantry weapons the world's two mightiest armies possessed—heavy and light machine-guns, rifles, automatic fire-arms, grenades, anti-tank guns. He had learned to find his bearings in the seeming chaos of battle and to oppose to it his own will—a will stronger than fear of death. He had learned to overcome fear, or at any rate to hide it. In short, Chokhov had learned to be ready to die for his country every day and every minute of the day.

Chokhov's tragedy was that now all these excellent attributes acquired through so much hard work seemed useless. Though a seasoned soldier, he was still young, and being none too well versed in history and politics, he sincerely believed that his country no longer had any enemies. And while he was glad that this was so, and considered without conceit that he too had contributed something towards this end, he could not imagine what he was going to do next.

The clock chimed again. Chokhov counted six strokes and got up, not in one leap as he had done for four years running, but slowly, deliberately, as one who has nothing particular to do.

The early morning light filtered into the room through curtains that billowed like sails in the open windows. Chokhov cast his eyes over the spacious, quiet bedroom of this typical German middle-class home with its innumerable china knick-knacks, low puffs, wall hangings with embroidered mottoes, and all sorts of phials and bottles on the dressing table. His army cap with its red star, the pistol in its holster, the red-covered service regulations and Furmanov's *Chapayev* still open at the page where he had interrupted his reading looked glaringly out of place in these surroundings. In the very air of the room a contest went on—a contest between the old musty smell compounded of the faint perfume of toilet soap, talcum, freshly laundered linen and the body odours of three generations of former occupants, and the new, pungent smell—of tobacco, leather belts, army wool, pine-woods and the persistent smell of gunpowder, so familiar to soldiers and hunters.

Each of these smells, now intermingling, now repelling each other, were at last overwhelmed by the eternal, peaceful fragrance, so remote from world problems, of the sunny morning which burst in through the windows.

Chokhov drew back the curtains. Before him lay the town, tranquil, glowing, and deserted, the silence broken only by the loud buzzing of fat green flies and the occasional sound of a window being opened.

"I must go," Chokhov said to himself.

He dressed and went out. The streets were still asleep. He paid no attention to the few isolated passers-by. They were Germans, and Chokhov paid no attention to Germans. He had assumed an attitude of complete neutrality towards them. They were to him nothing more than part of the townscape, while the quiet, picturesque old town itself was just another inhabited point where the regiment including Rifle Company Two was temporarily

stationed. To Captain Chokhov, Martin Luther's Wittenberg with its monuments, tombs, churches, its stormy past and its present life, was merely a tiny patch on the wide spread of a large-scale army map.

Chokhov passed the old town hall, several monuments with wrought-iron ornament raised to German 16th-century reformers, and the time-hallowed Wittenberg town church. He looked at all this with the same indifference as the old stones looked at him. In all of Wittenberg there was only one building that interested him—the red-brick barracks where the troops were quartered.

There was much activity in the barrack grounds in spite of the early hour. The soldiers—some of them stripped to the waist—were shouting to one another and rushing about, all clearly rejoicing at the coming of the moment they had so long awaited. They gave a casual greeting to the captain who had turned up so early and was crossing the drill-ground with studied stiffness, his whole smartly uniformed and inscrutable being expressing unspoken disapproval of the animation around him. Barely acknowledging the soldiers' greetings, he strode unhurriedly into the building, walked up to the first floor and down a long vaulted corridor with a resounding echo, and stopped before the door leading to the premises occupied by his company.

Strictly speaking, it no longer was his company, and the thought of having to part with it gave him a pang. The orderly rapped out the usual "Attention!" Everybody sprang up, and Sergeant Godunov's report was quite up to the mark. Everything proceeded as it should have, just as it had yesterday and the week before. Yet it was not quite the same. Nobody was asleep, although it was some time to reveille. The beds were made a little too neatly, as beds are made when they are no longer intended to be slept in. The middle-aged soldiers due for demobilization had gathered in the far corner like a flock of migra-

tory birds ready to take wing. Chokhov looked at his men with a glance intended to be stern, but which only succeeded in being rather wistful.

He said, "At ease." The soldiers went outside for physical drill, after which they would file in to breakfast. Only the orderly remained behind. Chokhov wandered about among the beds for a while as if searching for something, then went over to the window and stood looking out, as smart and inscrutable as ever. A casual observer would not have suspected that his whole accustomed world was collapsing about him.

The platoon commanders were several minutes late. Unpunctuality was something Chokhov could not tolerate, but today they had evidently allowed themselves the luxury of relaxing. Since there had been no official change in the day's schedule, Chokhov ordered them to take their men out for tactical exercises. This caused some surprise, nevertheless the platoons were mustered and one by one they marched out towards the outskirts of the town. Chokhov went to battalion headquarters to find out what was to be done next.

At battalion headquarters he found only the clerks on duty, and they were busy with long lists of men due for demobilization. Chokhov watched them for a few minutes and then went on to the regimental headquarters.

The place was in an uproar. The booming voice of the regimental commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Chetverikov, could be heard from the next room. Evidently the battalion commanders were in there with him. Major Migayev held the centre of the stage in the big room. He was being besieged by quartermasters and sergeant-majors who wanted to know what gifts were to be given to the demobbed men. A shipment of motor-cycles, bicycles and radio sets had been received for that purpose. The clerks were busy at their desks filling in forms, and two typewriters were clicking incessantly.

"Where's your company?" Migayev threw at Chokhov as soon as he saw him.

Chokhov drew himself up and saluted.

"On tactical exercises according to schedule," he replied. "Theme: rifle platoon in attack against a reinforced strongpoint."

Migayev smiled.

"Hm! Quite right, of course," he said and then added, "Wait a few minutes. I want a word with you."

A group of artillery officers from another unit came in. Migayev formally turned the regimental artillery over to them, and then, together with the regimental artillery commander, went outside into the yard. Chokhov watched the ceremony through the window. Powerful tractors were hitched to the field guns and mortars, which had been polished till they shone like new. But for the marks painted on the barrels by the gun crews to record the number of enemy tanks, carriers and self-propelled guns they had destroyed, they might have just come from the factory. The drivers and gunners stood about, smoking and talking. A middle-aged mortar gunner with two Orders of Glory pinned to his tunic tenderly stroked the barrel of his mortar with a knotted hand. At last the column of artillery moved off. The regimental gunners who remained behind, stood for a long time waving farewell to their weapons, probably for ever.

Migayev returned. His usually quick, springy gait was slow and heavy. A quartermaster overtook him to report that he had brought in a convoy of sugar, cheese and butter for the rations to be issued to the demobilized men.

"It's butter instead of guns now," remarked Migayev, with a glance at Chokhov.

He left the room again, followed by the clerks, and for a moment Chokhov was alone. Then a door opened and Chetverikov, the regimental commander, entered. He did

not notice Chokhov, but walked over to the window and then began pacing up and down the room with the bow-legged gait of an old cavalryman.

He obviously had nothing to do, and idleness was a new and distasteful condition for him. At last his eyes fell on Chokhov, and he looked sharply at the captain, assuming for a fraction of a second an expression of serious preoccupation. Then he relaxed, evidently deciding against pretence, or perhaps detecting a similar expression in the captain's eyes, and, going over to Chokhov, he squeezed the captain's small hand in his huge flabby palm.

"So it's all over..." he said.

It was not the words but the expression in his eyes that struck Chokhov. Chetverikov was looking at him with a helpless tenderness—helpless because it could not find tangible expression.

There was a call for the regimental commander, and he went away. Chokhov, giving up hope of catching Migayev that day, left headquarters and went to join his company.

2

Chokhov reached his company just as the men were settling down for a rest. The smoke from their cigarettes rose in vertical wisps in the still air.

He stopped near the bushes on the roadside to watch the soldiers. They were sitting or sprawling on the ground under the thick crowns of the old trees—beech, probably, he thought, although he did not know for sure. His eyes took in all these trees, the queer little grass-covered hills, the red-tile roofs of the town, and the pale-blue ribbon of the Elbe, but none of it really registered. All his attention was concentrated on the men in their tunics faded

almost white in the sun. He looked at them as if he had never seen them before. There was Slivenko, the company Party organizer, as usual in the middle of a group engaged in animated conversation. Slivenko was talking in his slow, deliberate manner, punctuating his words with an occasional jab at the air with his right hand. Chokhov for the first time looked at him not as the commander, not as an officer inspecting the appearance of a subordinate, but as one man looking at another. And it seemed to him he had never before noticed the dark face, the pitch-black moustache, the small pipe firmly planted between strong teeth, the kind, gentle eyes. A handsome man, Chokhov thought. He had never thought of any of his soldiers in these purely civilian terms before. He wanted to hear what Slivenko was talking about. Peaceful construction, most likely, he guessed and smiled, not without a touch of envy.

The rest interval over, the soldiers got up slowly, spread out into an assault line, and resumed the drill with little enthusiasm. The three young lieutenants in command of the platoons—all newcomers to the regiment—followed their men just as casually and without bothering to crouch for cover; their heavily-laden dispatch cases slapped against their sides. Chokhov frowned.

"That's a sure way to get killed," he muttered, displeased with this violation of the well-known rule laid down nearly two hundred years ago by Field-Marshal Suvorov: "Carry yourself in training as you would in battle."

Chokhov's presence was noticed and the lieutenants came over to him. He tersely ordered the men due for demobilization to be lined up separately and marched back to barracks.

The old soldiers stepped out of the ranks with alacrity and, brushing the grass and the dust of Germany from their clothes, came up to Chokhov. But they had no eyes

for him. They were smiling. For weeks now they had been looking forward to this moment, even though they had patiently and willingly gone about their duties and would have willingly continued to do so if need be. The prospect of having to part with Captain Chokhov and their faded, sweat-stained tunics clearly did not distress them. Their families and the work they had had to interrupt on that fateful Sunday in June 1941 were waiting for them in Russia. And so they lined up and marched back to town, this time without the customary song, for they no longer belonged to the army. They had already transferred to another army, far more bigger than the army they had been in, the army of people who work.

The trains for the demobilized men pulled in at Wittenberg station, at one o'clock in the afternoon. Chokhov, who had come to see them off, stood in silence on the platform watching the men climb aboard. Slivenko, who was helping to supervise the entrainment, did not find time to come up to Chokhov until a few minutes before the train pulled out. Without a word the two gripped each other's hand. Chokhov wanted to say something, to cry out; he wanted Slivenko to stay, not for his own sake, but for the army's, for the army to him was above all else. And when he saw a mist gather in Slivenko's eyes, there was a sudden constriction in his chest and for the first time in his adult life he felt he could weep.

The train began moving. Slivenko gave the captain a brief, masculine hug and climbed into a carriage. Chokhov turned on his heel and walked off with unseeing eyes.

That evening Sergeant-Major Godunov, Sergeant Gogoberidze and the others left to report for duty with the Third Task Army. The parting with the sergeant-major was less painful, for he was to remain with the army, and transfers from one unit to another were quite in the order of things. Indeed, it could not even be called a

parting, just another reshuffle. But for all that, Chokhov stood with Godunov by the waiting car for a long time under the rain that had started earlier in the evening. They said nothing, but their thoughts were alike; both recalled battles they had fought in which, now that they had become past history, probably seemed greater and more heroic than they had actually been.

All in all, Chokhov felt crushed and dispirited. It was as if a giant wave whose crest he had ridden so long had washed him up on some deserted beach and left him there.

He did not bother to turn on the lights in his room, but sat for a long while in the dark until his melancholy reflections were interrupted by a visit from Migayev and Veselchakov. A sudden joy flooded him on seeing the two majors, for all day long he had been oppressed by the thought that he was alone and unwanted. Yet it was not because they had any inkling of his condition that they had come. Now that the barriers of service relations had broken down and men ceased to be cogs in a vast machine and became personalities once again, each man naturally sought out those who had interested him before, but whose acquaintance he had not had time to cultivate outside the bounds of duty.

The room was now ablaze with light. Migayev sang a new song he had picked up recently; he proved to have a good voice, a fact which surprised Chokhov, for such talents seemed to him little in keeping with the post of regimental chief of staff. Afterwards all three went to Chetverikov's quarters. The usually grim-faced, somewhat formidable regimental commander turned out to be a pleasant, hospitable and even amusing host, perhaps because he was now practically in the same situation as all the other officers, a "zero," as Migayev joked. They had a few drinks and supped. In the course of the conversation Chokhov learned that he stood high in Chetverikov's esteem—something he had never suspected before.

The next day they all left for Potsdam where they were to report at the personnel section.

By this time regular train service had been resumed. The trains with their tiny carriages broken up into compartments, each with its own door, and no sleeping accommodation looked very strange to Chokhov—more like the suburban trains at home, or trams.

Travel by train was in general a novel experience for the officers. Throughout the war they had moved from place to place on foot, by car, or in the saddle. Besides, this was a German railway, with signs and inscriptions in German, station buildings painted in bright colours, and the gauge narrower than at home, all of which made it look more like a toy than the real thing. And, most incredible of all, the railwaymen were Germans. For the first time Chokhov felt he was abroad, perhaps because he was no longer with the army, but by himself, in the capacity of an ordinary passenger.

All the other officers had at least two travelling bags apiece. Chokhov alone carried one small suitcase, and that a crude affair of plywood. That was all that he had accumulated in the course of the war. Chetverikov, who had three bags, looked upon Chokhov's modest luggage with the respect which even the acquisitive person feels for another's complete contempt for personal possessions.

Taking their seats in a carriage reserved for Soviet Army personnel, the officers of the disbanded regiment settled down to a quiet smoke. The train pulled out.

Chokhov gazed out of the window. He did not want to talk. The men beside him laughed, sang, exchanged impressions of Germany and the Germans, talked about letters they had received from home in the past few days. None of this interested Chokhov. He had no relatives or close friends, and the only people he had been at all intimate with—the soldiers—had departed yesterday for destinations unknown to him. He felt that he would miss

them now more than he ever had before. His only hope was that he would be given another company. He longed for a detachment of men in grey greatcoats to whom he could pass on the knowledge he had acquired and that warm tenderness that lay hidden deep inside him.

The sight of crowds of German civilians everywhere annoyed him: they looked far too peaceful. Were these the people who fought us and fought so bitterly, he asked himself. He felt that they would never rise up again or dare to do anything that would necessitate maintaining an army, and hence himself, Chokhov.

It was strange to see the Germans walking about the platforms of the little stations, carrying suitcases and boxes, climbing into railway carriages and alighting from the trains to depart for their various homes. It was strange for Chokhov to observe this life which ran its own separate course despite all the perturbations of war and occupation.

But strangest of all was it to hear the German language spoken on all sides, that language which had come to be hated so violently during the war for the added reason perhaps that before the war it had been the most widely studied and respected of all the foreign languages in Russia.

One could guess that these Germans were living a life of anxiety and uneasiness, not knowing what awaited them on the morrow and what the presence here at these stations, in these towns and villages of these rather grim, silent Russians portended. There were rumours that all Germans would be exiled to Siberia, rumours about forced labour for the population, about the desert zone which the Russians reputedly planned to establish here just as the German troops had done on Russian territory.

They stared at the Soviet officers with something like fear not unmixed with curiosity, as if trying to read their fate in the eyes of the Russians. But the Russians walked

and drove past them as if moving in some other dimension: these were two worlds, two atmospheres, each of which lived its own sharply distinctive life.

In the meantime the train was rolling on through wooded country. The little carriage rocked and rolled violently, the hum of voices grew louder, and outside the sky grew gradually darker.

They reached Berlin towards evening and got a lift to Potsdam.

3

The newly arrived officers were assigned living-quarters and messes and left to their own devices. No one appeared to be interested in them. They were not summoned to headquarters and no one was in any haste to put them to work. There were vast numbers of them here, the entire suburban neighbourhood seemed to be full of much-bemedalled young men in officers' uniforms wearing the insignia of all arms of the service. A host of faces of the motliest variety flashed past Chokhov as he took his daily walk from the house where he had been quartered to the personnel section and back. Occasionally he met someone he knew, but this happened rarely.

Before long many of the officers took brief leaves of absence. Veselchakov went to the ambulance battalion to visit his wife Glasha; Migayev went to see his Stalingrad pals in the Eighth Army. Chetverikov too disappeared soon—evidently he had gone to see his brother, a general who served in the Second Tank Army. Out of habit the names of the towns were not mentioned, only the numbers of the army units stationed there. The officers were not yet conscious of Germany as a country; for them it was still merely a territory for the disposition of regiments, divisions and armies.

Chokhov was left entirely alone. He had been given a room in a small house. There were two beds in the room. The second bed was evidently occupied, judging by the suitcase under it and the army coat with captain's insignia on it hanging on the wall. But for five days there was no other sign of the man's existence. He turned up on the sixth day, at about four o'clock in the morning. Chokhov was awakened by the slamming of the door. He opened his eyes and the first thing he saw was that his neighbour's coat had gone from the wall. Later he found a note on the table written in an uneven scrawl.

"Don't worry about me, Captain," he read. "I have taken my coat. Pleasant dreams. You will find half a litre of German liqueur in my cupboard. Help yourself, I've no objections. Captain Vorobeitsev."

Chokhov chuckled, dressed, and went out for breakfast and thence on his daily trip to the personnel section. The crowd of officers there was particularly dense that day, lieutenant-colonels and colonels mostly, with an occasional general. This abundance of high-ranking officers waiting, like himself, for an appointment, made Chokhov feel very small indeed. If in his own regiment he had been something of a figure, one of those dare-devils of whom there were none too many in any regiment, here he very soon switched from an exaggerated sense of his own importance to a similarly exaggerated sense of inferiority.

If only he had had the courage to go over to one of the personnel officers and demand some attention. But the trouble was that having convinced himself of his insignificance, he was too timid and at the same time too proud to assert himself; he merely looked sadly at the table piled high with papers, index cards and records and at the stern backs of the personnel officers, and went away.

This time he went for a walk through the streets of Potsdam. The city had been badly bombed by the Ameri-

cans. Not that Chokhov was in the least interested in the architecture of the old Prussian capital—no, he looked at the palaces, the churches and the parks with complete indifference. He examined the town solely from the point of view of one who had taken part in the fighting there. He recalled certain incidents from these battles. He noted the spot where his company had crossed a lake, the two cellars where the German gunners had taken positions, the palace which had housed division headquarters. And surely this was the lawn—now very green and with neat little benches around it—on which Private Kucheryavenko was killed.

Chokhov stared at the lawn for quite some time. An aged German woman was sitting on one of the benches deftly plying a pair of long knitting-needles.

The town ended and what Chokhov would have called a "forest belt," in other words, woods and copses, began. It was somewhere hereabouts, he recalled, that his company had dug in, but although only a few weeks had passed since then he could not find the foxholes. For some inexplicable reason he spent quite some time searching for them and at last he found them—thickly overgrown with grass and almost invisible. He felt a vague satisfaction when he dropped into one—the foxhole he himself had occupied at the time. The ambulance company had been stationed on the left, he remembered, and he had shouted to them to get the hell out of there because their presence gave away the location of the company. Then Soviet T-34s had come crashing through and knocked down a lot of young trees. He had gone to the commander of the tank battalion and arranged for his company to ride on the armour.

Now the woods looked neat and tidy. There was no trace of the trees the tanks had run down, not even the stumps had been left—the Germans had evidently used them for firewood.

A little farther on he came upon some children playing in the woods. They were calling to one another and playing tip and run. When Chokhov appeared they stopped for a moment and then went on with their game. It was only then that Chokhov realized they were German children; at first he had looked upon them simply as children—Russian children, perhaps. He remembered how once during the fighting—here, or somewhere else, he could not recall—he had come across some German children hiding in a pit beside the wall of a small house. At the sight of Chokhov—he was unshaven then and there was a blood-stained bandage on his hand—they had stared at him with eyes round with fear, and one of them, the smallest, had hidden his face and burst into tears. Chokhov had walked past, paying little attention to them, although the little boy's crying had somehow stung him. But children hiding in pits were a common enough sight all through the war—he had seen similar scenes throughout the four years of the fighting.

Chokhov was struck by the contrast between the behaviour of the children then and now, and he stood for a while watching them run about with joyful squeals.

He walked on. The scene grew more deserted, the woods thicker. Dark, dense greenery hemmed him in from all sides. The crowns of the lime-trees with leaves almost as big as maple leaves formed a canopy overhead.

Although there was no one in sight, Chokhov walked on with his usual smart, brisk gait, his body erect, his face expressionless as if he were on parade. He felt a sudden urge to throw himself down on the grass and roll about in its green softness. But on second thought the idea seemed absurd; the several grim years that had passed had carried him so far away from such youthful pleasures that he simply did not know how to go about it. Nevertheless he sat down on the grass. It was tall and very cool. He glanced about him and lay down. His

eyes lighted on the trembling crowns of the trees shot through with the sun; they seemed to go on and on, high into the sky and far away to the horizon all round. Every leaf was aquiver, glowing, living a life of its own while belonging to a community of other leaves like it, and this community of leaves growing on one branch also had a life of its own, a specific tremor and radiance common to all of its members. And each branch, accentuated now by a deeper line of shadow, now by a more vibrant play of light, stood out from among other such communities living their own lives while sharing in the lush, tremulous life of the tree as a whole.

Chokhov got up slowly. Childhood memories overwhelmed him. He walked over to a tree and before he realized what he was doing he grasped one of the lower branches and pulled himself up into the midst of the green leaves. The twigs brushed gently against his face as he climbed higher. He found himself a secure perch and rested there. A green beetle settled down beside him, its back gleaming in the sun.

A flight of pigeons appeared, swirled round the tree and landed on the grass nearby. They walked up and down with their mincing gait, gracefully nodding their heads and turning every now and then to look at Chokhov.

Then with a loud whirr of wings the birds took flight and soared high up into the blue. As he watched them, Chokhov for the first time in years saw the sky—just as the other day he had seen his soldiers as human beings—simply as the sky, not a fathomless space which had to be watched because the enemy might appear there any moment. Dragon-flies reflecting all the colours of the rainbow frolicked in the sun.

It may have been the pigeons, for in his childhood he had been a passionate pigeon fancier, but the full realization of peace suddenly swept over him.

"Peace," he murmured, and then, louder still, "peace."

The word soon lost its meaning from repetition, but the feeling remained. Shortly, however, the insistent blast of a motor horn nearby brought him back to reality. He slipped down from the tree and barely managed to assume the poise befitting an officer when two army carriers came into view. When they were level with him they stopped and a major leaned out from the first of the vehicles to ask the way to Geltow.

"Straight ahead," Chokhov replied. "Just keep going."

He was his usual calm, composed self again as he saluted the major. When the carriers were gone he cast an annoyed glance at the tree and the dragon-flies and, angry with himself for his undignified behaviour, set out to walk back.

In the personnel section he found a quiet corner to wait in. There were a few empty chairs there, but he decided to stand, so as not to have to get up when a senior officer came in. With Chokhov it was a matter of principle to jump up as soon as any officer with the rank of major or higher came into sight—more out of respect for the uniform than for the individual, and, perhaps, in mute protest against his still remaining a mere captain. Of course I'll get up and salute every major that comes along, he seemed to be saying, although I myself should have been a major long ago.

But since it was not particularly pleasant to keep on jumping up, he decided not to sit down at all.

It was the end of the day. Only a few officers remained in the room, and the door opened less and less often to admit newcomers. Chokhov had just made up his mind to go over to Major Khlyabin, who was in charge of the "small fry," when the door was flung open and an officer with a captain's insignia walked in. He was tall and lean, and smartly uniformed in khaki tunic and blue breeches with crimson piping. A large map-case of the kind carried by airmen swung from his shoulder, giving him a rather

dashing appearance. Chokhov wondered idly where he had seen that unpleasant, pale, pasty face, straight light-yellow hair and small, deep-set eyes before.

The newcomer went round shaking hands. He seemed to know many of the officers present. As for the personnel officers, he treated them with an easy familiarity, leaning over their desks and whispering in their ears. And he actually slapped Major Khlyabin on the back.

It was not that the other officers particularly liked all this whispering and back-slapping, but the captain possessed the free and easy manner that disarms all but the most strong-minded or quick-tempered people, or else an immediate superior who is in a position to put the offender in his place before his bland self-assurance exceeds all bounds.

Chokhov, who was not too sociable and who in spite of, or perhaps because of, his independent character found it hard to strike up friendships, took an instant dislike to the newcomer. Yet there was an element of envy in his dislike—envy of the man's free and easy manner which he himself lacked. Indeed, he was sure it was because of this shortcoming that he had not yet received his appointment.

He overheard some officers sitting nearby saying that the demobilization commission was giving preference to those who wanted to return to civilian life, whose pre-war professions were at a premium at home, and also the older officers, the sick, and men whose service records were not of the best. As he listened, Chokhov placed himself in the last bracket, and his jaw set grimly. With a start he realized that the dandified captain had stopped to address him.

"Hullo, Captain, you must be my room-mate. I recognized you at once although I only saw you asleep in bed. I see you're also cooling your heels. Let's get acquainted. Vorobeitsev's the name."

Chokhov mumbled something incoherent in reply. He disliked the man's familiarity. Vorobeitsev, however, did not seem to notice Chokhov's scowl and rattled on:

"I must have seen you somewhere. Didn't you serve under old man Sereda? Of course you did. In Chetverikov's regiment? That's right. You don't remember me? Got a poor memory, I see. I was junior assistant to the senior batman at divisional headquarters—more precisely, transferred from the reserve to Ops. And you? Company commander? Infantry? How the deuce did you manage to stay alive?"

At that point somebody called him and he disappeared through the mysterious, awe-inspiring door behind which the commission was in session. Chokhov could not help admiring Vorobeitsev, yet when the latter came back he turned to look out of the window; his pride would not permit him to give the other any chance to think for a moment that he sought his friendship or patronage. But Vorobeitsev went straight to Chokhov. The garrulous captain had evidently taken a liking to the reticent one.

"Did you try the liqueur?" Vorobeitsev asked. "You didn't? You should have. Still staying at the hostel? Must be sick of the place by now. What's your name? Chokhov? Let me tell you, Chokhov, you're a babe in the woods. You behave as if the war was still on. *A la guerre comme à la guerre*, as Dumas *père* said embracing Dumas *mère*.

After this startling excursion into French literature Vorobeitsev vanished, only to reappear in front of Chokhov a few minutes later. For a moment he stood looking out of the window and smoking a cigarette. From this angle he looked quite different. An irregular sharp-pointed nose. A flabby jowl. Seen in profile the live, arrogant face looked tired, melancholy and somnolent. At last he turned to Chokhov with a sly twinkle in his eyes.

"So you're waiting for an appointment? Want me to lend you a hand?"

"All right," Chokhov replied, flushing with embarrassment. He knew that he should have rejected Vorobeitsev's offer at once or at least kept him off this subject. But the uncertainty of his position frightened him and prevailed over his scruples.

4

Chokhov felt so uncomfortable after his talk with Vorobeitsev that he took the first opportunity to slip out. Outside, he paused for a while in thought, then started off in the direction of his quarters. He had not gone far, however, before he heard Vorobeitsev calling to him. Chokhov again wondered why the breezy-mannered captain was taking such an interest in him.

"Why did you dash off like that?" Vorobeitsev said in a somewhat offended tone when he caught up with Chokhov. "Come on over to my place."

Vorobeitsev led the way to a small, low-slung but ungainly Steyr standing by the kerb. Opening the door, he slipped in behind the wheel and invited Chokhov to climb in beside him. Got a car of his own too, the devil, thought Chokhov, but said nothing.

As he drove, Vorobeitsev kept glancing at the silent Chokhov, evidently expecting him to continue the conversation started in the personnel section. But Chokhov stared out of the window and said nothing. At last Vorobeitsev broke the silence himself.

"When you're called before the commission, tell them you want to work in the Soviet Military Administration," he said. "I'll put in a word with the right people. You'll be in clover here in Germany. The Germans are frightened stiff and they'll do anything to oblige. And the girls... you'll like them."

He grinned and glanced slyly at Chokhov again. Chokhov said nothing.

They crossed a bridge into the suburb of Babelsberg. Turning into a quiet lane, Vorobeitsev drove right on to the pavement, nearly running down an elderly German in the process, and pulled up in front of a garden surrounded by an iron grillwork fence. The steep roof of a small house with a red weathervane on top was visible over the thick hedge of shrubs and lilac bushes that almost hid the fence.

Vorobeitsev watched Chokhov from the corner of his eye, but the latter appeared totally unimpressed. It was very quiet inside the house, which was furnished rather lavishly but with taste; it had evidently belonged to some wealthy people. But if Vorobeitsev had thought of impressing Chokhov with his quarters he did not achieve his aim. Chokhov climbed the wide, carpeted stairs to the first floor without so much as a glance at the mahogany-and-gilt furniture, the mounted hunting trophies on the walls, the handsome parquet floor, or the glass roof over the landing.

They passed through two rooms and entered a third, a huge room flooded with light, with a door opening on to a verandah. A big table in the middle had been laid for dinner. Two German servant girls curtsied when Vorobeitsev entered with his guest, twittered something and went out.

"Well, how do you like my digs?" Vorobeitsev said with a wide sweep of his right arm that took in the big table, the paintings on the walls, the white piano, the expensive reading-lamp beside the wide couch, and everything else in the room.

But Chokhov was already on the verandah. He rolled a *makhorka* cigarette, lit it and said:

"They'll kick you out of here one day."

Vorobeitsev's eyes narrowed.

"Who's going to kick me out? The Germans?"

"No. Our people," Chokhov said.

Vorobeitsev's face grew a shade paler. He gave a forced laugh and then said through clenched teeth:

"Yes, we're good at kicking people out. But why, can you tell me? After four years of fighting and roughing it a fellow ought to be able to live decently, as befits an officer, so we shouldn't have to be ashamed of ourselves in front of the allies and the rest of the world. You ought to see how the Americans have fixed themselves up. That's what I call life. We're always talking about democracy, but just let a lieutenant try and get away with what's perfectly all right for a general. With the Americans it's different—over there it's finders keepers."

Chokhov was a little shocked by the passion with which this was said. Vorobeitsev, however, caught himself and wishing to smooth over the effect of his outburst went on more calmly:

"A spring chicken, that's what you are, Chokhov. But to hell with it—let's live while we can."

Presently Major Khlyabin from the personnel section joined them. He strode into the room, tossed his mouse-grey raincoat on the white piano and came over, staring at Chokhov.

"That is Chokhov. A fine chap—served in the same outfit with me," Vorobeitsev hastened to reassure him.

The three sat down at table. For the first time in his life Chokhov drank liqueur; it was sweet but very strong, and he promptly felt its effects. He felt ill at ease in the company of Vorobeitsev and Khlyabin; he did not like the way they winked at each other and dropped their voices now and again to a whisper, and their hints at things Chokhov knew nothing about irritated him, as did the frequent mention of German women's names. Khlyabin who on duty was stiff and unbending now emitted a flood of foul language. He called Vorobeitsev a "go-getter" and openly admired the captain for his quick-

wittedness, roaring with laughter as he recalled some of his escapades.

Chokhov kept silent. At first the other two tried to draw him out, but finally gave it up and left him alone. Eventually Vorobeitsev found an opportunity to bring up the question of fixing up Chokhov. Moving close to Khlyabin, he began to speak in a soft, insinuating tone. The major's face at once assumed the same stern, unsmiling look it wore at the office, but at last he seemed to soften.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked Chokhov.

"Nowhere."

"What do you mean—nowhere?" Khlyabin was nonplussed now. "Don't you want an appointment?"

"No," Chokhov replied.

Vorobeitsev's eyes opened wide, he laughed, and said with a note of injury in his voice:

"What's the idea of playing the fool? A chap wants to do you a good turn. Tell him what sort of job you'd like to get. You want to get into Military Administration, don't you?"

There was an angry gleam in Chokhov's eyes, but his voice was calm:

"I want to be demobbed."

"That's easy," Khlyabin said.

There was a silence. Then suddenly both Khlyabin and Vorobeitsev lost their tempers. There was no logical reason for it, since for all they knew Chokhov might really have wanted to get out of the army. Nevertheless they acted as if Chokhov had let them down. His refusal to accept favours from them seemed to brand their entire behaviour as unsavoury. They both shouted at once, Vorobeitsev stubbornly insisting that Chokhov "stop playing the fool and say what he wanted," Khlyabin fuming and cursing and ending up with, "Who the hell do you think you are, you bastard. . . ."

Chokhov turned pale. He got up slowly, picked up a warm meat croquette from the platter, and before Khlyabin knew what was happening, smeared it over his flabby red face. Then he walked out of the room, and with an unhurried, slightly unsteady tread went downstairs, through the courtyard and into the street.

It was dark, and the air was heavy with the fragrance of lime blossom. Chokhov walked down the street feeling wretched and deflated. He could not understand why he had behaved as he did, and attributed everything to the liqueur which had taken him completely by surprise. He could not find any reason for the fury that had gripped him at Vorobeitsev's. He did not realize that it was the whole set-up that had caused him to lose control of himself—the white piano, the pale-blue couch, the intricate pattern of the floor, and the discovery that it was possible in these circumstances to "wangle" a job for a complete stranger, whose background, character or record one knew nothing about, a job that by right might belong to somebody else. None of this occurred to him now, and he blamed everything on his quarrelsome, unsociable character and the confounded liqueur.

He lost his way in the maze of unfamiliar streets and alleys. But he did not care. He walked blindly on and on, picturing the dire consequences of his stupidity. The memory of that wretched croquette and the wild look in Khlyabin's eyes made him groan.

At last he saw a familiar bridge before him. There was no sign of life anywhere round. To his left loomed the black chaos of rubble and mutilated trains and burnt-out buildings that had been the Potsdam railway station. Although the war had ended long ago and there was no more black-out, the houses here were dark, with hardly a lighted window to be seen anywhere. Chokhov walked on and on until he found himself in front of his own quarters.

Suddenly he found himself thinking of Lubentsov and wishing he could see him. He conjured up a mental picture of the major: his clear, shining eyes, his high-pitched, rapid speech, his sharp, precise movements, his small, expressive hands which were never at rest. Veselchakov had told him that Lubentsov was in hospital in Beelitz, somewhere to the south of Berlin, and Chokhov made up his mind to look him up.

Having made the decision he felt better. He went in, switched on the light, undressed and threw himself down on the bed, with a sideway glance at the next bed which was untouched as always. The dusty fibre suitcase still stood under it.

Before long he fell into a fitful sleep. In the morning he was awakened by someone shaking his arm. He opened his eyes to see Vorobeitsev standing over him.

Chokhov, thoroughly ashamed of himself, tried to mumble an apology, but the other would not listen to him. Instead he burst out into loud laughter.

"Well, you certainly gave it to him. Ha, ha, ha!" There was a ring of admiration in his voice. "The way you caught him with that croquette. I'd never have expected it of you. You should have seen what a sight he looked, ha, ha, ha!—with that croquette plastered over his mug."

Vorobeitsev seemed to be enjoying himself tremendously. Chokhov could not quite understand it, but then Vorobeitsev's behaviour in general was a mystery to him. Perhaps he was simply bored, and this was his way of amusing himself. Psychology was not Chokhov's strong point—he barely managed to understand the motives of his own acts—but he felt that there was something contemptible about Vorobeitsev. Here he was laughing at his friend Khlyabin and admiring Chokhov because Chokhov had risked his own interests, which was something he would never have allowed himself to do.

"He'll get even with you, I bet," Vorobeitsev lowered

his voice to a mere whisper. "Oh, but I tell you, he was a sight to look at."

Chokhov dressed in silence. In the meantime Vorobeitsev produced the bottle of greenish liqueur from his night-table, uncorked it, poured out half a glass and offered it to Chokhov, and when the latter shook his head, drank it himself. Then he lay down on his bed, lit a cigarette, and turning his head towards Chokhov, asked:

"Did you really mean it when you said you wanted to be demobbed?"

"I'll do what I'm told to do," Chokhov said. He put on his coat. Vorobeitsev started up.

"Where are you going?"

"To Beelitz."

"Why?"

"To see a friend—Lubentsov. He's in hospital."

"Lubentsov? Not the recey chap?"

"Yes."

Vorobeitsev grew thoughtful.

"Know him well?"

"Quite well."

"He's all right," Vorobeitsev said. After a moment's pause he continued, "And lucky too. He's one of those people who always get the breaks, the sort everybody admires, clever, brave—in short, the model officer. And he laps it all up. On the face of it he looks like a good scout, but that's all front. Thinks he's the one and only, and takes pride in being an example to others in devotion to duty and concern for his subordinates—within the limits of the regulations of course, no more and no less. But he can be pretty tough with anyone who doesn't fall in with him."

"Fool," Chokhov said.

"Oh no, he's nobody's fool."

"I mean you," Chokhov snapped.

He buckled his belt and turned to the door.

"Wait, I'll come with you," Vorobeitsev said. "My car's outside."

Chokhov looked at him in surprise but said nothing. In front of the house—on the pavement as usual—stood Vorobeitsev's Steyr.

They drove out of Potsdam, crossed the bridge, and were out on the open highway.

"There's a map of these parts in my map-case," Vorobeitsev said. "Take it out and check the route."

Chokhov took the map and found their location. They were now running through a wooded tract planted in neat squares.

Beyond the village of Michendorf they came to a huge viaduct.

"That's the *Autobahn* overhead," Vorobeitsev said. "Like to take a look?"

They drove up and saw an endless column of tanks, guns and infantry moving down the road.

Chokhov got out of the car and gazed spell-bound at the army units moving past. A keen sense of envy filled him at the sight of the lieutenants and captains riding at the head of their units. The troops were in high spirits and excellently fitted out. For one thing, there were no puttees to be seen; good leather high-boots had come in again. The army had assumed its smart peace-time appearance.

Chokhov's pulse quickened. Then he remembered last night's incident with Khlyabin which jeopardized all his hopes of remaining in the army, and he felt sick at heart. Was he never again to ride at the head of a company of well-armed, well-trained men, who were at once his subordinates and friends, the very reason of his existence? Had he outlived his usefulness? In what respect was he worse than that captain who just went by at the head of a company at full strength, with an adroit-looking giant

of a sergeant-major such as any company commander might envy?

Vorobeitsev cracked a joke, but Chokhov did not hear him. His thoughts were with this stream of men whom he would have willingly followed to the uttermost ends of the earth.

5

They drove on. In due time they came to a collection of cottages alternating with bigger blocks of buildings standing on narrow asphalt drives laid out in the woods. This was Beelitz, a town of hospitals, clinics and convalescent homes. Vorobeitsev parked the car—on the lawn of course—in front of one of the bigger buildings and the two men walked up to the main entrance. It was some time before they found anyone who could direct them to the block they wanted, but at last they got the necessary directions.

It was very quiet here, and the air was laden with the tang of pine. A woodpecker was hammering away somewhere nearby.

Chokhov walked ahead, with Vorobeitsev following a step or two behind and talking incessantly. He was still propounding the view that after several years of war an officer had a right to "take it easy," interrupting the flow of words only when they met a nurse coming down the street. At each such encounter Vorobeitsev would stop, strike up a conversation, shower the nurse with compliments and try to make a date with her. Chokhov could only marvel at the man's glib tongue, his easy-going manner, and his ability to lie so convincingly: in rapid succession he was a local resident, had come to inspect some hospital, was on his way to visit his father, a general who was convalescing. The girls were not taken

in by the lanky captain's stories but they could not help being amused and flattered by his attentions.

Chokhov went inside the building conscious of a pleasant thrill of anticipation at the prospect of meeting his old friend again. He stopped a middle-aged nurse and asked her where he could find Major Lubentsov.

"Major Lubentsov has been discharged," she told him.

Chokhov stood stock-still for a while, then turned and walked out. In a few moments he returned, but the nurse had gone. He opened the nearest door and looked into a large room whose furniture was concealed under white dust-covers. There were two men in white smocks in the room, and he went up to them and asked if they could tell him when Major Lubentsov had been discharged and where he had gone. One of the doctors answered that he had left hospital two days earlier, but he did not know where for. Chokhov was about to leave when he heard Vorobeitsev's annoyed voice behind his back:

"What do you mean you don't know? You're supposed to know. Look into your Talmud and find out at once."

The second medical officer, a small, dark-skinned, black-haired man, tried to calm the irate captain.

"Now, now, is that the way to talk?" he said placatingly. "No need to get excited."

"Now, now," Vorobeitsev mimicked. "We know your sort." His face contorted with sudden rage.

The swarthy doctor was so taken aback by this that his lips began to tremble. It is hard to say how the incident would have ended had not an M.O. with a colonel's insignia entered the room just then. He turned out to be in charge of the hospital. The two doctors stood up, and Vorobeitsev took the opportunity to slip out of the room. Chokhov, dreadfully embarrassed, timidly asked the colonel where Major Lubentsov had been sent on his discharge.

"In the first place, he's not a major, but a lieutenant-

colonel now," was the good-humoured reply. "He got his promotion a few days ago. He was discharged from hospital as fit for active service. I'm afraid that is all I can tell you, my friend." Seeing the disappointment in Chokhov's eyes, he took pity on him and added, "I believe his wife is still here, though. Tatyana Vladimirovna is here, isn't she?" he asked the two doctors in the room. "Oh, I see. Sorry, she appears to have left too." After a moment's silence he said as an afterthought, "If I am not mistaken, Comrade Lubentsov was given an appointment in the Soviet Military Administration."

Chokhov took leave of the colonel and said good-bye to the other two doctors, but neither of them replied.

He found Vorobeitsev standing on the wide stone stairs, smoking. Darting an angry look at him, he strode past him and headed for the front door.

"Now then, keep your shirt on," Vorobeitsev said in a conciliatory tone as he overtook Chokhov. "I just don't like doctors. Besides, how did I know the colonel was going to turn up?"

Down in the street Vorobeitsev opened the door of his car, but Chokhov made no move to enter.

"I'll take a train back," he said instead.

"Nonsense," Vorobeitsev said, somewhat taken aback. "Drop it. All right, I apologize. Got too excited." And when Chokhov after some hesitation finally climbed into the car, Vorobeitsev remarked with unwilling admiration, "I say, what a character you've got!"

The car rolled down the drive. For a time neither of the men spoke. At last Vorobeitsev broke the silence to ask whether Chokhov had found out anything about Lubentsov, and when Chokhov told him of Lubentsov's appointment to a post in the Soviet Military Administration, he jammed on the brakes out of sheer surprise.

"What did I tell you!" he said triumphantly. "Lubentsov knows a cushy job when he sees it!"

"Nonsense! He was offered the job and so he took it," said Chokhov.

"Offered, eh? Oh yes! Routed out of bed in hospital and rushed to the Administration. No, brother, it doesn't happen like that. You can be sure he and Sereda are old pals and he's probably thick with Sizokrilov as well. He's a bright young man. You needn't shake your head. I'm not saying he isn't a good officer, mind you, but he knows what's what. And why shouldn't he? I don't blame him. On the contrary!"

He stepped on the accelerator. The car shot ahead as if catching its owner's mood. But before long they had to stop again to make way for more columns of Soviet troops on the march. Each unit was followed by commissary lorries with field kitchens.

"What's this, manoeuvres?" Vorobeitsev wondered.

Radio cars went by followed by a long column of artillery.

"Strange," Vorobeitsev said.

They reached Potsdam late at night. The next morning Chokhov again went to the personnel section.

Here, among the crowd of officers hanging about outside, he ran into Captain Meshchersky, who had served in the same division with Chokhov as commander of the reconnaissance company. The two had been friendly from the first and were very pleased to meet again.

Meshchersky looked worried, but he was not too preoccupied with his own troubles to notice that Chokhov too had something on his mind.

"You look glum," he said. "Anything wrong?"

"I'm afraid they're going to demobilize me," Chokhov confessed.

"With me it's the other way round. I'm afraid I'm not going to be demobilized," Meshchersky said with a wry smile.

They both laughed and went inside together. To their surprise they were told to wait—their cases would be taken up at once. Half an hour later Chokhov was summoned.

As he walked into the room where the commission sat, he was really afraid—probably for the first time in his life—and it took all his self-possession to conceal the fact. It was a big room, and behind a desk at the far end sat the chief of the personnel section and three other colonels. On the desk stood glasses of tea and a stack of files containing the complete service record of each officer. There was a personal file for every officer in the army, and it followed him like a shadow to every town and village he was stationed in, to every unit he served in, all the way into the active or non-active reserves.

Chokhov reported and stood at attention in the middle of the room. The colonel sitting in the middle of the group behind the desk asked him to sit down, but he was too nervous to register the meaning of the words. In the meantime the colonel looked through the contents of one of the files, glanced up at Chokhov, turned back to the papers, smiled, and drew the attention of his neighbour to something he found in them.

I've had it, thought Chokhov.

Just then Khlyabin walked in. After a brief glance at Chokhov he bent down to speak to the personnel chief, and laying down several more files on the desk he darted another look at Chokhov and withdrew.

I've had it, Chokhov told himself again, and he had to make an effort to retain his composure.

The members of the commission conferred in low voices. Finally the presiding officer looked at Chokhov and said:

"Sit down, please."

Chokhov perched himself on the edge of the chair. The colonel stretched, sipped his tea, and went on:

"We are thinking of appointing you commander of a rifle company here in Potsdam. Any objections?"

"None whatsoever," Chokhov replied.

"You understand of course," the colonel continued, stifling a yawn, "the duties of a company commander in peace-time are quite different from war-time. Personal bravery, though always commendable, is now of secondary importance. The main thing is to know how to train your men, to teach them everything a soldier must know, including of course the importance of personal valour. More attention must be paid to drill since the smart, efficient appearance of the army is especially important in peace-time. Is that clear?"

"Yes," Chokhov said.

He listened attentively, still unable to believe in this stroke of luck. It seemed strange that the colonel could speak in such a matter-of-fact tone when he, Chokhov, could hardly restrain himself from throwing his arms around him and weeping from sheer joy. A warm feeling of being at one with this colonel and the army as a whole welled up in him.

As he walked out of the room, Chokhov remembered Khlyabin and Vorobeitsev and his spirits leapt again. The knowledge that they were powerless to decide a man's fate restored his peace of mind, freed him of the oppressive doubts that had been tormenting him ever since that fateful evening.

Concealing his feelings, he pushed through the crowd of officers outside. Suddenly he remembered Meshchersky. His friend's wish to leave the army—this wonderful army—seemed utterly mad. Yet he wanted everybody to be as happy as he was and he forgave Meshchersky and wished him luck.

He stopped to wait for his friend and after a while heard his voice. The two men hurried towards each other.

"I can see everything's all right with you," Me-

shchersky said. "Congratulations! You can congratulate me too—I got what I wanted."

They clasped hands in silence. A solemn feeling of uplift gripped both of them. They felt that they were now embarking on a new stage in life.

"Here, take my address," Meshchersky broke the silence and with a quiver in his voice dictated: "Art Theatre Street, Moscow 9.... Will you write to me? We haven't seen very much of each other, but I've grown very fond of you."

"Right," Chokhov replied not quite to the point and coloured. He was not accustomed to expressing his emotions.

6

To the outside observer the westward movement of troops which had mystified Chokhov might have seemed like the final afterswell of a tidal wave that had struck and subsided. Yet it had a very definite place in the overall scheme of things.

It was connected with the withdrawal, in conformity with a secret three-power arrangement arrived at in Yalta, of the British and American forces stationed on the Western banks of the Elbe and Mulde to the Western frontiers of Mecklenburg, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. These forces began pulling back on July 1, 1945, and the Soviet troops moved in to fill the vacuum.

Motor-borne forward units moved up first. The men were in excellent spirits, for it was pleasant to be on the march again after two months of unaccustomed inactivity. Moreover, it was a new sensation to be pushing westward without any fighting and with no danger of being killed at the next bend in the road. Indeed it had something of the fascination of a holiday excursion to

hitherto unknown parts. And so, as they rode along, the soldiers praised the diplomats who had made it possible to occupy town after town without resistance.

But no sooner had they crossed the river which formed the old demarcation line than the towns and villages appeared to have been abandoned by their inhabitants. Yet there was ample evidence to the contrary: the vegetable plots were ready for the harvesting, the orchards were heavily laden with ripening fruit; spades, hoes and other implements with fresh traces of earth on them lay where they had been dropped just a few minutes before, and the barn-yards were filled with hens, ducks, and geese. But no people. Not a soul in sight anywhere.

The soldiers could not understand it. They had forgotten the time when German civilians had trembled in fear before them—and there had been a time when such fears were not unfounded. However, in those areas where they had been stationed until now, a marked and significant change had taken place in their relations with the Germans. Nor was this merely the result of the instructions and orders issued by the Soviet Command and the Soviet Administration. It sprang from direct contact between the Soviet troops and the local population, for such contact existed in spite of the fact that it had been discouraged, if not prohibited. Out of an elementary sense of justice the soldiers realized that all these men, women and children who made up the population of Germany could not be held responsible for the heinous crimes committed by their rulers. As for the Germans, they realized almost at once that the Soviet Army was not at war with the civilian population, but, on the contrary, was ready to establish friendly relations with them, often tending to be even more generous than it should have been.

Hence it was quite natural that the Soviet troops who entered territory previously occupied by the American

and British forces should have been surprised at the fear displayed by the local population. But they had neither the time nor the desire to give much thought to the matter, and they rode along in their lorries, smoking and exchanging brief comments, secretly wondering, in their present peaceable and good-natured frame of mind, why their coming should inspire such trepidation.

Now and again the forward units overtook American and British units withdrawing westward. On such occasions the fighting men of the allied armies exchanged friendly greetings and curious looks, but the enthusiasm of the first days after victory had abated. They were far more restrained now—like villagers who get together to put out a fire only to return each to his own house, his own field, and his own private affairs as soon as the job is done.

The vanguard units reached the designated points, and the roads of Central Germany were silent and deserted again for a few days, until they were filled once more by the main forces of the occupation army.

The divisions moved in full battle kit as they had in war-time. And although no hostilities were expected within the next hundred years, the units sent out advance guards and flanking patrols strictly in accordance with regulations. Cyclists and mounted dispatch riders dashed about like mad. As for the scouts, they fanned out from the main body of troops, and instead of following the wide highway, picked their way over the paths and byways which the sun had turned as firm and dry as the asphalt. In wooded country they spread out among the trees and crept along with cautious steps, ears attuned to the soft rustling of the leaves, ready to detect at any moment the presence of the enemy.

Many of the scouts still wore camouflage capes as they had in the war.

One of these reconnaissance patrols had bivouacked in a sparse copse on the wayside. They had built a fire and

were preparing their evening meal when a small green vehicle—half carrier and half passenger car—pulled up nearby. Three men got out and stopped to watch the scouts sprawling on the ground or unhurriedly going about their chores around the camp-fire.

Someone in the patrol drew the attention of an officer to the onlookers, and buttoning up his tunic he went over to investigate. As is customary in the army, he looked first at the insignia of the strangers and only then at their faces. One of them was a lieutenant-colonel, another a sergeant-major, and the third, evidently the driver, a private. The lieutenant-colonel, who had been watching the approaching captain, spoke first.

"I knew I'd find acquaintances here!" he said. "Captain Belousov, I believe?"

"Comrade Lubentsov!" the captain beamed as he recognized the famous scout. Most reconnaissance officers knew each other.

"Where do you expect to go now?" he asked. He knew that Lubentsov's division had been disbanded.

"I've already got my appointment," Lubentsov said and a shadow passed over his features. "As a local commandant." Casting another look at the reconnaissance patrol in their green capes he added wistfully, "Well, good-bye, recey!"

He declined the captain's invitation to join them at the camp-fire where the flames were now leaping merrily and the steam was rising from the mess tins suspended over them.

"You go back to your men," Lubentsov said. "I'll just watch them for a little while before I go."

Belousov, a little surprised by this strange wish, hesitantly took leave of Lubentsov and returned to his company. Lubentsov stayed another five minutes watching the bivouac. Then he waved his hand and climbed into the car.

Soon the car turned on to a quiet, deserted road. There was no sign of troop movement here. Villages slipped by, and church spires traced their silhouettes against the clear sky. Another long summer day—a day full of impressions and events—was drawing to a close. The turn from the highway filled with Soviet troops to this deserted road seemed symbolic to Lubentsov. He looked at Voronin in the back seat, expecting to read on the sergeant-major's face a pensive longing for what had been left behind. But Voronin had no regrets. He accepted the change in his life with the fatalism typical of soldiers; as a matter of fact, he was pleased at the prospect of launching on something new and unknown. That was why the green camouflage capes round the camp-fire had not appealed to his imagination. Noticing the lieutenant-colonel's eyes on him he said:

"It's early yet, but I see they're all in bed."

The "they" meant the Germans. And, true enough, there was no sign of life, not even the barking of dogs, in the villages they passed.

Brought back to the present by Voronin's remark, Lubentsov too began to wonder at the silent aspect of these villages. The Germans evidently were lying low in anticipation of the radical and perhaps unpleasant changes that could be expected with the substitution of Russian troops and Soviet ways for the British and the American.

Lubentsov peered tensely at the darkening outlines of the sharp-pointed roofs under which an alien and incomprehensible life flowed on—the life which he himself was about to enter.

How he would do it, he did not know. The briefing in Karlshorst had been confined to generalities. And of these there had not been many—three, to be exact, the three "de's": democratization, denazification, and demilitarization. Had he been asked before his appointment, Lu-

bentsov himself could have given a fairly good description of what had to be done in Germany. He too would have spoken about these three "de's," perhaps adding a fourth, dismantling. Yes, he too would have said the same things as the general the other day, though with less eloquence and self-confidence perhaps.

But yesterday, after his visit to Halle and the district commandant's office in Altstadt where he had had a detailed talk with two officers of the Administration, he had began to realize that things were far more complicated than they had seemed. The two officers, Lieutenant-Colonels Leonov and Gorbenko, both intelligent and well-informed men, had willingly initiated Lubentsov into the wide range of issues to which he would have to find solutions at his new post.

Before the Soviet Military Administration lay a large country which had been defeated in a hard-fought war, a country disillusioned in its past and lacking faith in its future. Its trade and the credit system had been dislocated, its towns reduced to ruins, its transport and communications services turned half a century back. Its moral standards were perverted; the precious experience of its revolutionary movement had been forgotten, trampled upon and desecrated; the ethical code of human behaviour had been monstrously distorted. All this had to be revived or built up anew. And primarily it all had to be understood.

To say the truth, Lubentsov shrank from the very thought of it all, and he preferred not to delve into it too deeply in advance. Instead, he did what men have done since the beginning of time in similar dilemmas—he decided to "wait and see."

In Altstadt he stayed overnight with his new friends, Leonov and Gorbenko, who had arrived there a few days before and taken up quarters in a private house situated on a pleasant, tree-lined street. The owner, an architect

named Auer, was a little man with thick grey hair and a head too big for his body. Delighted to find that Lubentsov knew German and had a wide range of interests, he produced some albums on German architecture and embarked on a discourse on the meaning and development of the Gothic style. In the course of the conversation it turned out that Dr. Auer was not only an architect, but a rather big capitalist in his own right, the owner of a good-sized firm manufacturing building materials.

As Lubentsov turned over the leaves of the albums, he smiled inwardly at the thought that here he was talking to a mortal enemy of his class, a capitalist. This capitalist was clever and, moreover, friendly towards the Russians, as he assured Lubentsov. He was not at all like the bloated gentlemen with hook-noses and grasping, bejewelled fingers so beloved of cartoonists. Lubentsov looked at his strong, somewhat stubby hand and saw he wore only one ring, and that a wedding ring. He did not speak of surplus value or of exploitation of the proletariat, but of vaulted ceilings and stained-glass windows. And he spoke with such sincere inspiration that it seemed nothing in the world interested him except art.

True, later on he touched upon politics, but with a tired, absent expression on his face.

"Wise Germans, and there are such," he said with the shadow of a smile, "will no doubt fully co-operate with the Soviet authorities in the matter of denazification and demilitarization of Germany. Both sides would benefit if the Soviet authorities were to take local traditions and the local way of life into consideration in implementing these measures."

Dr. Auer spoke slowly so that the Russians should be able to follow him better. He liked the Soviet officers for the breadth of their interests and their good manners: they listened to him with knitted brows clearly trying to catch his every word. And as he spoke he was thinking

that when barbarians come to civilized lands, even as conquerors, one must enlighten them, introduce them to a higher order of reasoning, for as history has shown time and again they are highly receptive.

Lubentsov, completely ignorant of what was going on deep down in the architect's mind, thought his ideas were reasonable enough. He noticed of course that when Dr. Auer spoke about the denazification and demilitarization of Germany he said nothing about democratization. Lubentsov also realized that the "local way of life" he mentioned was a subtle synonym for capitalism. But it was not this that put Lubentsov on his guard. It was the studied indifference with which Dr. Auer spoke about politics as of something of third-rate importance in marked contrast to his enthusiasm for art. The insincerity of the German's casual tone when it came to the vital issues of life made Lubentsov doubt the sincerity of his raptures over art. Lubentsov had a vague suspicion that his pleasant host was trying to deceive him.

In the meantime Dr. Auer, evidently conscious of the shadow that flitted across Lubentsov's face, led the conversation back to architecture.

"This is Strassburg Cathedral," he said as he turned over a page. "Note how the massive proportions are combined with exquisite lines. It took nearly two centuries to build. The people who designed it knew they would never see its completion, for in those days there were no cranes and no excavators. Everything was done by hand. But they went ahead nevertheless, they did not think of themselves, but gave themselves wholly to their art. We do not even know whether they felt any envy for the future generations that were to see the superb edifice in its finished form." He stopped for a moment as if in thought, then looked at Lubentsov and continued with a faint suspicion of a smile, "Since you will probably be with us for quite some time—whether we like it or not—you

might find it useful to have a deeper understanding of the spirit of German architecture."

Lubentsov agreed fully with the architect in spite of the slightly supercilious tone in which he had spoken. The capitalist was right. He, Lubentsov, must make a study of German architecture. And not only architecture, but also history, and the local traditions of which Dr. Auer had spoken, and the psychology of the local bourgeoisie and, of course, the workers. Dr. Auer did not even suspect how deep an impression his words were making on the newly-baked commandant.

Now, as he sat in the car and recalled the conversation with Auer, Lubentsov clenched his teeth and repeated to himself, "Never you mind, we'll study and we'll understand!"

Gradually the landscape changed. At first the highway had run through flat country, but now after a couple of hours on the road the terrain began to develop folds. The farther they drove the higher and more numerous the hills became. They rose up in three or four terraces, of which the first was covered with the pale green of beet fields and the purplish hues of cabbage patches, often flanked by rows of trees, the second tier taken up by ripening rye and the third by dense cherry orchards or yellow expanses of rape in bloom, while the highest tier was topped by a dark cap of evergreen forests.

Eventually real mountains loomed up in the distance. The road climbed imperceptibly but steadily, and the higher it rose the richer grew the landscape and the more luxuriant the vegetation. Every now and then a large field of white or red poppies, pink clover or yellow mustard slipped past. Pear-trees and cherry-trees, spreading lindens and silvery poplars planted on both sides of the road lent it a special charm.

Forgetting his worries and anxieties, Lubentsov felt himself merging with nature, something he had not felt

for a long time. The utter peacefulness of the scene took him back to his childhood in the Far Eastern taiga, reminded him of the times when he had accompanied his father on hunting expeditions, spent nights under starry skies and not uttered a single word for days on end, for his father was not the talkative kind and he himself had only wanted to listen to the voices of the rivers and forests and the call of the birds.

He felt amazingly light-hearted and he gave himself up to a mood of pleasant languor. He wondered a little at it, and put it down to the fact that he was in love. Perhaps this is what made him so alive to the beauty of nature. Yes, there was no doubt Tanya had something to do with it. Latterly he had more and more often caught himself thinking and feeling for both of them. And he chuckled good-naturedly at the idea of looking at everything round him through two pairs of eyes—hers and his own.

To be frank, it must be admitted that his recent promotion too contributed to his pleasant mood. But this was excusable, for he was a professional soldier and to a professional soldier a major is not much more than a captain, but a lieutenant-colonel is practically a colonel.

Engrossed in the flood of thoughts and impressions that jostled each other in his mind, Lubentsov was completely oblivious of his companions until Voronin's prosaic voice broke upon his ears:

"I think we ought to stop somewhere for the night and get something to eat."

True enough, it was growing dark. And since some shadowy shapes of buildings loomed up at that moment to the right of the road, Lubentsov told the driver to stop.

7

Voronin opened the gate and the car rolled into a spacious courtyard. Several people emerged from the darkness. Voronin tersely explained what was wanted.

"*Schlafen,*" he said.

"*Bitte, bitte,*" a man's voice hospitably and rather eagerly invited.

The speaker led the way to the big, dark house. The door opened and Lubentsov and his companions found themselves in a hall panelled in oak and flooded with light from four ceiling fixtures concealed in the corners. On an elevation in the middle stood a stuffed hippopotamus, and the walls were hung with sketches of African natives and photographs of African landscapes and villages built on piles. A staircase with carved oaken banisters led up to a landing with a similar railing running around the hall. Heavy oaken doors opened off it into the rooms on the first floor.

"The manor house, I bet," Voronin said, rather pleased.

Their escort turned out to be a dark, insignificant-looking young man wearing plus-fours and a short jacket gleaming with zip fasteners. He waited impatiently while the Russians examined the hippopotamus, and then ushered them through a glass door at the back into the dining-room and motioned them to armchairs. When they were seated, he vanished. Lubentsov told Voronin to bring in some of their rations from the car. Voronin got up reluctantly and sauntered round the room examining the pictures on the walls, obviously in no hurry to go. Finally he went only to return almost at once accompanied by a buxom girl who mumbled a greeting and opening an enormous sideboard proceeded to lay the table. Then she and Voronin disappeared again.

Lubentsov went to the window and looked out. The light from the room snatched a rectangle of green trees

and flower-beds from what was evidently a large garden. From the distance came the sound of trickling water—a fountain or a brook perhaps. Lubentsov was conscious of the strange and not unpleasant sensation of having been suddenly wrenched away from the world he knew and transported to another, alien world too different to seem real. His only link with the real world was a thin thread of memories, like the telephone wires he had so often unrolled behind him on his way deep into enemy positions. It was hard even to imagine in these surroundings that men like Taras Sereda, Captain Meshchersky, General Sizokrilov, Plotnikov, and Chokhov existed at all.

When Lubentsov turned away from the window the table had been laid, but the food was not army rations. The young man entered through a side door and invited Lubentsov to the table, addressing him as "Herr Kommandant," from which Lubentsov concluded that Voronin had managed to advertise their identity. He darted an annoyed look at the sergeant-major, but the latter averted his eyes and winked surreptitiously to the driver who beamed approval.

They were all seated at the table when a small side door opened and a beautiful woman in her late thirties came in. She went straight over to Lubentsov, who rose at her approach, and they shook hands. Not knowing exactly what to do under the circumstances he stood still; the situation might have become awkward, but his smile, pleasant and friendly as always, came to his rescue. The mistress of the house returned the smile. His friendliness evidently reassured her, for the anxious frown that had appeared between her big grey eyes vanished. With a gracious gesture she waved Lubentsov to his seat, but instead of sitting down herself she turned to address the maid—or perhaps to show off her beautiful back revealed by the low-cut dinner gown. Voronin and the driver she ignored completely, as if they had not been

there at all. This was probably the only flaw in her otherwise charming behaviour. But before she had taken her chair beside him, Lubentsov introduced his companions.

"Dmitry Voronin, Ivan Tishchenko," he said.

She caught herself, extended a hand to both in turn and introduced herself.

"Lisette von Melchior."

Lubentsov introduced himself.

The woman raised her eyes to the ceiling with a half-jocular, half-serious expression as if engaged in some complicated mental arithmetic, and then said:

"*Also, Herr Lubentsoff, Herr Woronin und Herr....*"

Tishchenko's name proved too hard for her to pronounce and she sat down with a pleasant tinkling laugh. She put some salad on Lubentsov's plate and smiled at him. Then she served the others, but without the smile.

With hidden curiosity, feeling as if he were in a theatre, Lubentsov watched the graceful movements of the lady of the house and the subtle changes of expression on her face. He thought it best not to reveal that he knew some German, for this enabled him to observe her better; besides, silence helped to protect him against possible infringements of etiquette. And so he applied himself silently to the business of eating, though not without a puzzled glance at the mysterious array of silver laid out beside his plate.

The silence that prevailed during the meal could not be called oppressive, for the Germans believed the Russians did not know their language and the Russians knew the Germans did not know theirs. The company limited themselves to polite smiles and many a "*bitte*" and "*danke.*" Each, however, was busy with his own thoughts.

Lubentsov was secretly praying that neither he nor his comrades should unwittingly commit some *faux pas*, and from time to time he cast a warning glance at Voronin

and Tishchenko. He was also trying to imagine what Tanya would look like in the hostess's gown.

The lady of the house, on her part, was equally afraid of doing something that might offend the Russians—for instance, not falling in with their democratic ways. The lieutenant-colonel had just shown very clearly how touchy they were on that score. He seemed most charming and his manners were perfect and he was quite at ease, if a little shy, perhaps. But this was not all that was on her mind. In spite of the lieutenant-colonel's pleasant appearance, she did not trust him. She was afraid the Russians might steal something. She decided to tell the servants to roast them a turkey for the road, and to put in some wine—she knew from books that Russians liked wine; she could give them a few inexpensive presents besides, to show her readiness to co-operate with the Soviet occupation forces, and also to satisfy their natural acquisitiveness without risking greater loss.

As for Voronin, he was congratulating himself on having agreed to serve under the major, that is, the lieutenant-colonel—he couldn't get accustomed to Lubentsov's new rank. He foresaw interesting times ahead spiced with all kinds of adventure, which meant that there would be plenty to write about to his family back home in Shuya. At the same time he watched Lubentsov with approval and noted that he behaved as if he had supped with wealthy landowners all his life. Though he was the soul of honesty, Voronin understood that these Germans with their studied politeness were afraid for their possessions; he felt contemptuous of them and glad that they were afraid.

Private Ivan Tishchenko, a dour, slow-witted man, concentrated on the food, quite correctly believing that as the driver of the chief's car there was no need for him to bother his brain when the chief himself was there, and that his job at the moment was to eat whatever was put

before him. Every now and then he cast an eye at the numerous zippers on the young German's jacket, wondering what they all were for and why on earth people needed all those fancy gadgets.

The young Junker with the colourless eyes and the low forehead was not particularly burdened with thought either. He was chiefly concerned in watching his mother so as to do everything she thought necessary in this rather trying situation.

Certain that neither the lieutenant-colonel nor his subordinates knew German, Frau von Melchior began after a while to talk with her son. From their conversation Lubentsov learned to his amusement that a) he, Lubentsov, was a very nice young man, b) Voronin was a rogue, c) the driver was a repugnant beast, d) there was something valuable (what exactly, he could not make out) that had to be hidden in a safe place from the "guests," and e) the Russians were not gentlemen like the British, but neither were they pigs like the Americans.

All this she said with a delightful smile that made her look more charming still and in a manner as if she were asking for mustard or the bread plate. She was obviously enjoying the situation. Her son responded with a sickly smile.

Lubentsov behaved as if he understood nothing. He finished his meal quickly and, glancing at his wristwatch, turned to the lady with a forcedly apologetic smile. She in her turn pretended to be disappointed that the lieutenant-colonel wished to retire so early.

The young man conducted the three Russians across the hall where the hippopotamus stood and up the stairs to the first floor. Lubentsov and Voronin shared a large stuffy bedroom. Tishchenko, however, refused to stay in the house. He had never trusted landlords and capitalists and thought it better to sleep on the back seat of the car to make sure no one ran away with it.

Lubentsov awoke early in the morning. He dressed quietly so as not to disturb Voronin and went downstairs to the porch which looked out on the courtyard. By day the place seemed even bigger than it had at night—almost big enough for a good-sized Soviet state farm, he thought. There were long brick barns, pig-sties, granaries and other storehouses, all two-storey buildings, the top floor, judging by the curtains and potted flowers in the tiny windows, being evidently used as living quarters for the farm-hands. The yard was cobblestoned, but the stones were barely visible through the thick layer of filth and manure and rotten straw covering it. Only the asphalt drive leading from the gate to the house was kept clean. In the middle was a rectangular platform piled high with manure. Farther on stood the silos and a white pump-house, dimly visible through the chill morning mist, and from the darker buildings in the distance came the lowing of cattle and an occasional whinny. Turkeys and guinea-fowl strutted about the yard.

An entirely different picture opened before Lubentsov on the other side of the house. The front windows looked out over a shady and apparently spacious park which gave way near the house to a rose garden with a bronze fountain in the centre.

After standing for some time in the shadow of the trees, Lubentsov went back to the farmyard. Another working day was beginning there. The bright-green doors of a shed were thrown open and three tractors rolled out one after the other. At the other end of the yard some farm-hands were harnessing powerful draught horses to waggons as big as buses. An old man with a grey moustache wearing his cap pushed over the eyes was driving a herd of a good hundred cows out through the gate. Behind the cattle came the sheep herded together into a solid mass by a shaggy black dog.

When the cattle and sheep had passed through, Luben-

tsov went to the wide oaken gate. From here a view opened on a large village consisting almost entirely of two-storey red-brick houses with bright-green window casings and shutters. They stood close together, with an occasional tall whitewashed stone fence in between. The stone cottages and flagstone pavements without a touch of greenery anywhere reminded Lubentsov of villages he had seen in the Crimea and Caucasus. The absence of trees and grass was all the more strange since from what he had seen of Germany, it was a country singularly rich in greenery. And thinking of the old trees in the estate park, he fancied that once upon a time all the trees in the neighbourhood had been ordered to move there, and they had obeyed, leaving the village bare, stony and exposed to the sun.

But there were some trees in the village after all. Lubentsov, following the cattle, came upon them at a pond in the middle of the village facing a little red church. The old cowherd noticed that the Russian officer had followed him and his charges, and for a moment his eyes betrayed panicky fear. Lubentsov smiled and saluted. The old man stopped for a moment, bowed stiffly and at once began hustling the herd along with a great deal of shouting and cracking of his whip. The herd moved on quickly up a street.

The village was waking up. There was much crowing and clucking, lowing and bleating, neighing and barking. Women appeared in the yards of the houses. Shutters opened and the sleepy heads of children looked out of windows. It was a pleasantly familiar scene and Lubentsov could not help thinking that every Russian, even a city-dweller, cherished a deep, inborn love for the countryside.

Coming closer, Lubentsov noticed a large number of people camped at the edge of the pond. Many of them were still sleeping, some on beds of straw and rags, some

under the shelter of crude tents from which their feet stuck out. A few had got up and were washing their hands and faces in the pond. Some of the women ran to nearby houses to ask for the loan of a cup or a plate.

A child screamed somewhere nearby, but no one paid the slightest attention. The people were all preoccupied with their own affairs as another long, trying summer day came into its rights.

Lubentsov turned at the cry and under the willows at the edge of the pond he saw a big raw-boned man beating a little girl with flaming red hair. The man was standing with his legs planted wide apart and beating the child with a handful of willow switches with such deliberate fury as if the cause of all the misery of war, defeat, homelessness and poverty was concentrated in that tiny, quivering body. The cold fury of it shook Lubentsov. He walked over to the man who, on seeing a shadow fall next to his, looked up. The man's huge hands dropped to his sides as he pulled himself up to attention, and the willow switches fell to the ground. Lubentsov searched for German words to give vent to his feelings, but try as he might he could not find anything suitable.

"Not good," was all he could say, in halting German. "Child, little child."

A little pale woman rushed over to press the red-headed girl to her breast, and then hastily placed herself between the man and Lubentsov. Talking incessantly and so fast that Lubentsov could not follow her at all, she now smiled pityfully at the Russian, now turned to the raw-boned man; she was evidently grateful to Lubentsov for having interfered, and at the same time she was afraid for her husband. Hence, while scolding him noisily, she kept pushing him back away into the willows.

The little girl, however, immediately forgot her recent ordeal and stared with open-mouthed curiosity at Lu-

bentsov. Even her countless freckles seemed to widen with wonderment.

"Who are these people?" Lubentsov asked the woman, pointing to the people round the pond.

"We are refugees from Silesia," the girl cried in a shrill voice before her mother could answer. She beamed with joy and pride at talking to a real Russian officer, which was something the other children had not done.

Lubentsov shook his head and thought of the big house with its vast, echoing rooms and its two sole occupants.

As he walked slowly back towards the estate he noticed that many of the refugees, mostly men, were following him. Thinking that they wanted to speak to him, he stopped. But they passed him, sullenly keeping their distance, and went on to the gates of the estate where they were met by the young landlord, now dressed in a warm overcoat and green hat with a rabbit's tail on it. The refugees crowded at the gate while he issued orders in a loud voice, letting them in one by one. Noticing Lubentsov, he bowed and said with a touch of apology and pity in his voice:

"Refugees."

"So I see," Lubentsov muttered.

"Work," the landlord continued, pointing first to himself, then to his farmyard and the fields and gardens round about. He looked sorry for the refugees and highly pleased with himself for giving them work.

Lubentsov went into the yard where he found Voronin and Tishchenko standing by the car.

"Let's get going," Lubentsov called out to them. "At once."

Voronin wanted to suggest that they have breakfast first, but decided against it when he saw the gloomy, distracted look on Lubentsov's face. Tishchenko started the engine and they drove out of the yard.

8

The road began to climb as soon as they were out of the village, winding in and out among the hills. This was the beginning of the Harz. Now and then they caught a glimpse of red-tile roofs down below in the valleys. The landscape grew more picturesque, reminding them of the Crimea, though it lacked the luxurious vegetation of the South. The roadside and the steep slopes dropping down now on one side, now on the other were covered with hawthorn and sweetbrier and barberry bushes. Dense fir forests marched up the mountain sides to the very top; the sun gilded the tips of the dark green trees. This indeed seemed to be a realm of eternal peace and quiet.

The sound of rushing water accompanied the travellers, for the road ran parallel to a mountain stream whose crystal waters hurtled headlong down a rocky course. Occasionally they passed a sleepy-looking roadside inn displaying a huge sign in Gothic lettering and a deer, or wild boar, or some other beast painted on it.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon Lauterburg finally came into sight. It was Lubentsov's first view of the place that was to become his residence, and he stopped the car to survey the scene. The town lay in a bowl surrounded by high hills, its red steep roofs jutting up from an abundance of greenery. On the far side of the town loomed the grey squat bastions of a medieval castle, looking gloomy and forbidding despite the bright sunshine.

After this bird's-eye view of Lauterburg, Lubentsov got into the car and the descent began. Just outside the town some large apparently lifeless factory blocks came to view to the right of the road. Lubentsov told Ivan to drive up to them.

There is something unnatural and abnormal about a deserted factory, for all the spacious shops, the endless rows of machine tools, the narrow ribbons of steel tracks

running in all directions, the great overhead cranes lose all meaning when paralysis sets in.

There was no sign of life anywhere on the factory grounds. The vast slumbering realm of metal was slowly but surely falling into decay, a heavy smell of long-dead fires hung in the air, and one felt that not much time would pass before it would all be covered with moss like some relic of the hoary past.

Lubentsov and Voronin walked into one of the shops, their footsteps echoing hollowly under the soot-darkened glass roof. Lubentsov looked about him with a heavy heart. How quickly, he thought, nature recaptures everything man relinquishes. All that man has accomplished has been wrested from nature by force; let him but cease to act, and the elemental forces that for ever seek to revert to the primeval will do their work with amazing ease and inexorable finality. Man-made things tend towards inertness and obliteration in the vastness of nature; let nature have its way and the creations of the human mind will crumble into dust.

"Not much point hanging about," Voronin said, depressed by the spectacle of decay. Besides, he remembered what Tatyana Vladimirovna had said about not letting Lubentsov exert himself too much so soon after his convalescence. "Nobody here."

Lubentsov stopped to listen. Then cupping his hands round his mouth he gave a long, loud call as a woodsman might do in the forest. There seemed to be a faint answer, and sure enough the figure of a man emerged from behind a squat shack hung with red fire extinguishers and firemen's axes. Lubentsov would not have been surprised to come upon some long-haired, long-bearded cave man wearing the skin of a wild beast in the midst of all this desolation, but there was nothing of the cave-dweller in the man who was now approaching. He was clean-shaven

and rather well-dressed which made the rest of the scene seem even more fantastic and unreal.

The man doffed his hat and introduced himself:

"Marx."

Lubentsov started.

"Werner Marx, engineer. At your service," the man repeated.

The engineer's downcast appearance showed that the desolation round about weighed heavily on him too. He took Lubentsov into the office and showed him the books, which were what had kept him here—the sole remaining representative of the thousands that once had manned the works. His job was to draw up an inventory of the plant in preparation for dismantling.

Marx talked willingly. He was glad to have someone to talk to, and he was clearly proud of the exemplary condition of his books, which he kept so accurately with the sole purpose of dealing the final death-blow to the dying factory.

As he walked back to his car accompanied by the engineer, Lubentsov asked him what had happened to the workers.

"They're all here—in Lauterburg and nearby villages, trying to make a living as best they can," the engineer said, shrugging his shoulders.

Lubentsov got into his car. A quarter of an hour later they drove into town.

Lauterburg was not as picturesque as it had looked from the hills. The town had suffered considerable damage. Many of the streets were covered with rubble from demolished houses. There was no traffic and no people in the streets. Only every now and then, a British army patrol appeared.

Lubentsov told the driver to stop.

"See those spires?" he said to Ivan. "Wait for me there, by the church. I want to have a look at the town."

Voronin protested.

"You shouldn't walk so much."

"Come on, Dmitry Yegorovich, you can't see anything from a car."

Voronin shrugged his shoulders and followed his chief.

They walked slowly down the wide, flagstoned street. Grass grew between the slabs and the freshness of the young green emphasized the age of the town itself. Yes, it was a very old town. The side streets branching off the main thoroughfare were medieval—dark and so narrow that a car could hardly pass through them, lined with half-timbered houses whose second floor jutted out over the first, and the third over the second. Here and there under the cornices were carved wood figures painted green, red or yellow. The pointed roofs had turned dark brown with age.

The main street led to a large square named, as in so many other German towns, Marktplatz, or Market Square. Here stood the church whose twin spires Lubentsov had seen from the distance and where he had told Ivan to wait. The car was there, but not Ivan. Lubentsov noticed that the left wing of the church had been damaged, and that shell splinters had mutilated an 11th-century statue of Roland wrapped in an almost tangible aura of antiquity. For a moment Lubentsov and Voronin gazed in awe at the thousand-year-old stones through which the green blades of grass of 1945 were reaching up to the sun, at the great sword of the legendary knight and his stone features all but erased by time.

The other buildings fringing the square had survived and together with the elm-trees and tiny garden in the middle formed a pleasant little oasis in the midst of ruins. To be exact, the ruins began behind and to the right of the church, while the houses to the left were intact. The fresh wounds borne by this town, old enough to have been ravaged by Attila's hordes, caused Lubentsov to

wonder; as far as he knew the allied armies had not seen any major action in the Lauterburg area; indeed, they had passed through these parts of Central Germany without encountering any resistance to speak of.

Lubentsov and Voronin walked on until they reached the foot of the hill on the north side of the town on which stood the castle they had seen from the distance. A sandy road winding in and out through a maze of greenery led up to it.

Beside the hill, in a park surrounded by an iron grille fence, a big, handsome house with the Union Jack floating over it stood in splendid isolation. This was evidently the British commandant's residence. And down below, to the right, was the railway station with its signals and goods sheds looking to Lubentsov a trifle incongruous in this medieval setting. The station was seething with activity. Long strings of green lorries were pulling up at the platforms to unload, yard engines puffed away, and the tracks seemed to be jammed with railway waggons. There were huge packing-cases all over the place, and among them British soldiers could be seen hurrying to and fro.

No sooner had Lubentsov turned towards all this activity than two English soldiers started towards him. He eyed them with curiosity, for until now he had seen few Britishers. The books he had read had given him the impression that all Englishmen were tall, lean and taciturn. The two he now met were neither tall nor lean, nor disinclined to talk. On the contrary, they shouted at him. Lubentsov smiled and shrugged his shoulders, but even the reliable charm of his smile appeared to have no effect. The soldiers grew louder and more menacing, and one of them made a gesture that left no doubt he was being told to move on. This made Lubentsov a little angry.

"I am the Soviet commandant," he said.

The soldiers subsided at once, exchanged glances,

saluted and made an unhurried but unquestionably discomfited retreat towards the station.

The encounter set Lubentsov thinking, and after a moment's reflection he turned back towards them. Despite his rather pronounced limp he walked quite fast, followed by a disapproving and disgruntled Voronin.

Soon they were back on the square. The car was still there, but there was no sign of Ivan. They found him inside the church examining the place with sleepy eyes in which any feeling of reverence was notably lacking.

Ten minutes later Lubentsov alighted in front of the British commandant's office. He walked past the sentry and through the front entrance. The house, once a luxurious mansion, looked shabby and bare. Lubentsov's keen eyes at once noticed that the parquet floors looked fresh and new in the middle and faded around the walls—the carpets had been removed quite recently, probably not earlier than the day before. Instead of light fixtures, loose ends of electric wiring hung from the ceilings, and in the vestibule packing crates were stacked between the columns.

Word of the arrival of the Soviet commandant had preceded Lubentsov. He was met by the British commandant, a tall, round-faced, stoutish major with thin legs and a tiny moustache on a ruddy face. He was accompanied by a short, middle-aged, pale-faced German, who turned out to be the interpreter. The interpreter's Russian was surprisingly fluent, though somewhat old-fashioned, suggesting that it had been learned in Russia before the Revolution.

"Welcome, dear sir, please honour us with your company."

The little German's exaggerated politeness and manner of speaking might have amused Lubentsov in other circumstances, but now he was in no mood for levity. There were a great many things he did not like, one of

them being the presence of a German as an interpreter for the British commandant. With the war just over, the fact seemed very much out of place, indeed, almost insulting.

The British commandant—Major Fraser was his name—led Lubentsov into his office, where a ground plan of Lauterburg was prominently displayed on the wall, and began at once to enumerate the key objects where sentries had been posted and offered to turn them over. He called Lubentsov "my dear Lieutenant-Colonel" with a friendly familiarity.

"Very good, my dear Major," Lubentsov replied in the same tone.

At that point a loud rumbling was heard outside. The two commandants went over to the window. A long column of Soviet artillery, stretching perhaps for kilometres for all one could tell, was moving in. A feeling of boyish elation filled Lubentsov, to whom it seemed an incredibly long time since he last saw a Soviet Army unit. He stood for some time gazing with avid interest at these guns he had seen hundreds of times before.

"Well, shall we go?" he turned at last to Major Fraser.

The major nodded and put on his beret, and together with the interpreter the two commandants left the office. As they were passing through the next room Lubentsov saw two Englishmen standing at the open window hurriedly jotting down notes. One of them, a short, stubby man, was wearing a smoky blue uniform, and the other, tall and lanky, was in khaki with a brown beret. The British commandant noticed them too and with a quick glance at Lubentsov said something to them in a low voice, whereupon both the blue and the khaki slipped out through a side door without saluting.

Lubentsov stopped dead in his tracks and gave his English opposite number a look of hurt reproach. He wanted to speak out, but decided against it, firstly

because he did not want to give the German interpreter the pleasure of witnessing a scene between a Russian and an Englishman, and secondly, because he was not at all certain that it was good politics to admit having noticed such an unfriendly gesture on the part of an ally. Lastly, he may have been prompted by the subconscious feeling that an injury suffered in silence gives one an advantage that may prove useful at some later date.

The British major was definitely embarrassed. His round, good-natured face fell and he closed up like an oyster. Had he thought he had the right to be frank, he might have said that as an honest man he was disgusted with all these underhand machinations directed against allies, and that he did not share his superiors' opinion that it was necessary to resort to such methods. But he could not be frank, for he did not believe that Lubentsov was frank either. As for Lubentsov, he had been inclined to be friendly and trusting but now he was on his guard.

Lubentsov got into Fraser's big car which had been standing in front. They drove off with Voronin following in Lubentsov's.

Lubentsov asked to be taken to the railway station first. The German interpreter translated this into English, and as Lubentsov had expected, Fraser demurred. There was nothing to see at the station, he said, and suggested they drive to the castle, and from there to the displaced persons camp, the brewery, distillery, and if there was time to spare, to an inn up in the hills not far away where they served excellent trout. First of all he thought they ought to go to the distillery and post sentries.

"I would rather see the station first," Lubentsov insisted, and had his way.

"What are you loading?" Lubentsov asked as they stepped out of the car outside the station.

"British army property," Major Fraser said and Kranz quickly translated.

They walked down the platform, past stacks of crates. Voronin, his right hand resting on his sub-machine-gun, caught up with Lubentsov. The Soviet commandant was keenly aware of the awkwardness of his position as he wandered among these bulky crates addressed in black English lettering. He was at a loss to know what to do. If he asked the British to show him the contents they might well refuse on security grounds. He stood undecided while the German porters went past carrying bales on their backs.

"I would suggest the distillery, my dear Lieutenant-Colonel," Major Fraser said again.

This "my dear Lieutenant-Colonel" stuff was getting on Lubentsov's nerves. He ignored the suggestion.

9

A mountain of crates blocked the way to the far end of the platform. Lubentsov cast a significant look at Voronin from the corner of his eye. The sergeant-major's face was taut, and his small, thin hand gripped the sub-machine-gun harder. He saw that Lubentsov wanted to tell him something. Chibiryov, Lubentsov's late orderly who practically had been able to read his thoughts, would have understood at once; Voronin could only hazard a guess.

Wondering whether Voronin had caught on, Lubentsov drew the attention of the British commandant to the mountain side overgrown with beech and hornbeam facing them and began talking about the scenic beauty of the surrounding country. The mountains enchanted him, he said, perhaps because he had spent his childhood in the hills of the Far East. Old Kranz translated in great detail while Major Fraser nodded absently, one eye on the station.

Suddenly one of the crates on the top of the stack shifted, tilted over and crashed on to the platform next to the two officers, then slowly tipped over once more and splintered against the rails below. Fraser leapt aside while Lubentsov, inwardly rejoicing, made a good show of giving Voronin a calling down for his clumsiness. The sergeant-major, his face still red from exertion, pretended to be frightened out of his wits.

For a moment the British panicked, but then the flurry subsided, and they stopped to wait for further developments in sullen silence.

"Look, Major," Lubentsov said, pointing to the smashed crate in feigned surprise. A neat little grinding machine was showing through the wreckage, so new and shining that it seemed to have just hatched out of its wooden shell. A brass plate attached to it read:

CHEMNITZ, MASCHINENBAUWERKE

"That's German equipment," Lubentsov went on, "and as you probably know German equipment is not subject to evacuation. The arrangement arrived at does not entitle you to dismantle and ship out industrial equipment from this zone. I must ask you to stop loading operations."

He spoke slowly, and in Russian, as if it did not concern him whether the Englishman understood him or not. For he knew Fraser understood him perfectly. Kranz too knew it and made no attempt to translate. Lubentsov went on in a calm, perhaps even gentle tone, because he was no longer thinking of the British, but of Voronin, and the little sergeant-major's grit and presence of mind, and his ability, so important to the scout, of finding his bearings in any circumstances.

In the meantime Voronin, now master of the situation, was prying one crate open after another with a jemmy which appeared in his hands in some mysterious manner.

All the cases turned out to contain German machines and other equipment. The German workers disappeared. Lubentsov, now completely ignoring the British round him, supervised the proceedings.

"Open that one. No, the next one. Let's take a look at this crate. Ah, a boring mill. And this is a turret lathe," he said with a glance at Major Fraser. "That's enough, now."

Major Fraser turned red, coughed, and snapped at the interpreter:

"A misunderstanding!"

It seemed to Lubentsov that Kranz barely managed to suppress a smile; at any rate it took him longer than usual to find the Russian equivalent.

The machine tools turned out to have come from an underground factory that had made V-2s. It was located not far from Lauterburg, but had not been entered on the ground-plan the British commandant had turned over. When they got back to the office, Lubentsov asked Major Fraser to indicate the location on the map. The latter did so, drawing a circle at the proper spot.

Lubentsov recalled the German interpreter's intonation when he had pronounced the Russian word for "misunderstanding." He had seemed to enjoy it tremendously, but perhaps that was because he was pleased to discover he had not forgotten the word, though it was a hard one to remember.

"Are you sure that's all?" Lubentsov asked with a scowl.

Major Fraser stopped to think for a moment, and then added a chemical plant and a small precision-equipment factory to the map.

"Everything packed up there too?" Lubentsov asked.

"Yes," replied Fraser.

Lubentsov shook his head in a gesture of despair that required no translation. Major Fraser turned red again and hastened to suggest that the Russians set up their

headquarters in the building the British had occupied; it was quite convenient for the purpose. Under Hitler, he said, it had been the "Brown House" of the local nazi organization.

In the meantime it was necessary to have Soviet sentries posted at the key points. Lubentsov told Voronin to get in touch with one of the nearby army units and have them detail some men for the purpose. As for Fraser, he no longer had any inclination to attend to the transfer formalities personally, and entrusted the job to one of his officers, who went out with Voronin.

Dead silence settled in the room when they left. Lubentsov looked out of the open window, while Fraser stared at the back of his head with something akin to hatred. At last the British commandant pulled himself together and invited Lubentsov into the next room, where a table had been laid for two. Kranz perched himself gingerly at the end of a sofa.

Fraser said that he was not a professional soldier, that he had been educated at Eton and Oxford, and that he was a baronet. Did the lieutenant-colonel know what a baronet was? Lubentsov said he did, although he knew next to nothing about British titles. Fraser added that he believed the lieutenant-colonel also came from a good family. He did, Lubentsov replied, his father was a lumberjack and his mother a peasant. There was a vague mumbling from Fraser who went on to say after a brief pause that he too had been in the Far East, though not on Soviet territory, but in Hong Kong and Singapore.

At this point the British commandant was called out and Lubentsov remained alone at the table. He did not speak to Kranz, but he looked at him once or twice in a way that made the German feel very uncomfortable.

Fraser appeared in the door some ten minutes later, looking very pleased with himself, and from behind him came the sound of sobbing, shuffling of feet, and a low,

excited murmur of voices. Throwing the door open, he ushered in three people: a stout woman with a big wart on a red, flabby cheek, wearing a red striped sweater with rolled-up sleeves, a wide skirt and an oilcloth apron, another woman with grey hair combed smoothly back and a man's overcoat thrown over her shoulders, and an elderly gentleman wearing spectacles and carrying his hat in his hand. The woman with the wart poured out an excited flood of German, slapping her rather ample hips to emphasize a point and punctuating the tirade with an occasional sob followed by an apologetic smile. Lubentsov gathered that they had been robbed and were asking for protection.

Major Fraser bestowed on the deputation a charming smile and with a sweep of his arm in Lubentsov's direction introduced him: "The Soviet commandant."

He was fairly beaming, as if he were presenting an old friend of his and moreover the only man who was in a position to solve all problems and dispel all doubts. Then he gave Lubentsov an amused look, drew to one side and sat down with a nonchalant air as if to say that none of this was any longer his concern.

From the British commandant's behaviour and the embarrassment of the Germans Lubentsov at once guessed that the complaint had a direct bearing on him personally. And true enough, it turned out that the thieves were Russians from the local D. P. camp.

Lubentsov got up and stood for a while undecided. For a moment he was tempted to ask them to put the complaint in writing, and promise to look into it tomorrow. But convenient though it would have been to put off an unpleasant matter in this way, he knew it would not do. Instead he picked up his cap and said:

"I'll look into it myself."

It was dark outside, and there was a warm drizzle. A dull gleam of glass showed where the car was standing

at the kerb. There was not a glimmer of light to be seen and the street was completely deserted.

"Ivan," Lubentsov called.

The headlights of the car suddenly wrenched a cone of rain from the night. The three Germans who accompanied Lubentsov kept at a safe distance.

"Get in, quick," Lubentsov said rather sharply as he signed to them to climb into the back of the car.

Slowly the Germans got in and Lubentsov sat down beside Ivan. The headlights slipped over the walls of the old houses and shone on wet clusters of green hanging over stone fences. They wound in and out of a great many narrow streets paved with uneven flagstones until at last the buxom German woman cried:

"*Hier, hier*!"

Ivan jammed on the brakes, and Lubentsov followed the Germans into a large courtyard. On the right was an automobile service station and on the left a dark house with doors and windows wide open through which people could be seen going about with candles. The yard at once filled with shuffling footsteps and low voices. A pocket torch flashed on; the beam ran over the car, paused for a moment on Lubentsov and went out instantly. One German, who evidently was more courageous than the rest, came up to Lubentsov and told him that about half an hour earlier six overcoats, two sewing machines, three radios and a keg of wine had been taken from the house and a blowtorch and some tools from the garage. One of those who did it had been a Russian with a peg-leg from the nearby camp. The German seemed to be in a great fear of this one-legged man.

"Where is this camp?" Lubentsov asked. Several voices gave him directions, but he was too impatient to listen, and, picking out of the crowd a boy of about fifteen he shoved him into his car and drove off. In the vegetable plots outside the town limits the boy guided them to a

gravel road leading to some wooden barracks surrounded by rows of poles with lengths of barbed wire still hanging from them. Lubentsov got out of the car and walked towards the nearest barrack. A woman with a white kerchief was standing at the door. As he approached, the woman ran in crying in a high-pitched exulting voice:

"They're ours! Ours have come!"

A score of doors on both sides of the long central corridor were thrown open and the corridor filled with people. Lubentsov was practically pulled into a big room dimly lit by a paraffin-lamp standing on a crude deal table. It had unplastered board walls and a couple of dozen wooden beds, some covered with striped straw-filled mattresses, others with nothing but thin cotton blankets. Two of the corners had been screened off with sheets, and in a third a cradle was suspended from the ceiling. There was a smell of babies' diapers and paraffin oil.

A crowd of women wearing white kerchiefs and men in quilted jackets gathered round Lubentsov.

Someone pushed up a chair for him. The older women hovered over him as if he were a long-lost son who had unexpectedly returned. The young girls wiped their tears away with their kerchiefs. Thin, starved-looking youngsters reached out to touch his shoulder-straps; his insignia and decorations interested them more than anything else. The room grew more crowded every minute.

A broad-shouldered young man in a white Russian shirt and with a heavy stubble of blue-black beard was gazing intently at Lubentsov.

Lubentsov was showered with questions. A bottle and a herring with cucumbers appeared on the table. Lubentsov would not drink, however, but promised to come again in a few days when he was not so pressed for time. He had already got up to leave when he remembered the purpose of his visit. For a moment he hesitated to mention the matter at all, but then decided he had to.

There was a quick exchange of glances. The man with the dark beard got up. Lubentsov now noticed for the first time that he had only one leg.

"Must we return the stuff?" he asked.

"Yes," Lubentsov said.

"Very well. We'll return it."

He went outside with Lubentsov and, asking the latter to wait for him, disappeared. The commandant stood tense in the darkness, overcome by the warmth with which these people had received him, and pity for them and a feeling of pride for his army. Why must I make these countrymen of mine who have suffered so much return property that probably was dishonestly acquired in the first place? he thought. Why must I hurt these men and women on whom so much insult and injury has been heaped as it is?

He heard the tapping of the wooden stump in the darkness.

"I've arranged it," the cripple said as he came up. Then, after a moment's silence, he added, "I was a lieutenant, you know. Taken prisoner at Vyazma in 'forty-one —that's where I lost the leg." A pause, and he went on, "It all turned out badly—very badly."

"That's all right," Lubentsov said. "Everything will straighten out."

"I can only blame myself," the man went on as if thinking aloud. "I could have shot myself. Though it's easier said than done. My leg was gone. I remember seeing it there beside me, cut clean off by a dud. While I was staring at it they got me."

"That's all right," Lubentsov repeated. "It'll all straighten out."

"Half of the wine's gone, but they'll get the rest back. Some of the fellows have already gone to return the stuff by the short road, across the gardens. We can drive over and make sure if you like."

A crowd had gathered in the yard and was watching them from the distance.

"We wouldn't have taken a damn thing from them if we hadn't reached the end of our tether," the cripple went on. "The Americans, and especially the British, made it tough for us. They didn't even give us enough bread. Always stuck up for the Germans and had it in for us. When we pointed out to them the Germans who had been the worst bastards under Hitler, the British didn't touch them. But the other day the British came and told us we could do whatever we wanted to, for the Russians were coming in anyway. We lost our head. . . ."

"Don't let anything of the kind happen again," Lubentsov said.

"Right. I knew it wasn't the sort of thing the Soviet Command would allow."

"Of course not."

"Shall we go?"

They went to the car and climbed in. The German boy was still huddled on the back seat. The car turned round and was again on the road.

"The British posted notices that the Soviet authorities had set a seven-o'clock curfew for the Germans," the ex-lieutenant said. "Anybody caught out later than that is shot. Is that a lie too?"

"Of course."

"I thought as much," the man said with a wry smile. "God knows why they spread stories like that."

"Strange, isn't it?" Lubentsov said.

"To you it may seem strange," the other put in sharply in spite of what he had said a moment before. "But if you had been here through it all. . . ." He made a gesture of disgust.

When they drove back into the yard where the robbery had occurred a crowd of shadowy figures closed in round

the car. This time there was a great deal of loud, animated talk as people hastened to assure the commandant that everything had been returned and that they had no more complaints. And perhaps the loudest in her thanks was the fat woman with the wart.

In the midst of it all the Germans noticed the peg-legged man and immediately fell silent.

"I want to thank you," Lubentsov said, turning to him in front of them all and shaking his hand. And for the third time he repeated, "Everything will straighten out."

10

After what had happened Lubentsov decided not to go to the British commandant's office for the night. Had the crippled ex-lieutenant invited him, he most probably would have stayed with the Russians in the camp. Indeed, he wanted to go there and talk with the people, bolster their spirits and help dispel the vague anxiety which was inexplicably mingled with their joy. As it was, however, it could not even occur to the ex-lieutenant that the Soviet commandant had no place to stay the night, and after respectful farewells, he took himself off into the darkness. The tapping of his wooden leg soon receded into the distance.

"Let's go down to the station," Lubentsov said.

"It wouldn't hurt you to get a little sleep," Ivan objected as he turned the car round and drove back into the dark streets. Bending over the wheel, he spoke as if thinking aloud, "It's a queer sort of situation. I just can't make it out. Landlords and capitalists all around and Communists in the commandant's office. What's going to come of it all? What do the Germans think? And who are they going to follow?"

Lubentsov smiled.

"You've put your finger on it," he said. "All the governments and cabinet ministers are pondering over this too. You should be in the government, Ivan."

"Heaven forbid," Ivan replied fervently.

At the station Lubentsov found a Soviet patrol pacing up and down the platform. He spoke with the two soldiers for a minute or so and got back into the car.

"Let's go to the underground factory," he said.

Soon they were out of town. The car climbed a steep hill and then coasted down. Lubentsov switched on the light and examined the map; the turning was somewhere hereabouts. At last the headlights picked out an almost unnoticeable road branching off to the left. They followed it through a field of rye and up into tall rocky hills overgrown with pines. The headlights revealed the sheer sides of granite crags; it was a miracle that trees had ever found foothold in this chaos of bare rock.

They slowed down. Almost immediately they were challenged in Russian:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Lubentsov was pleased to see that the sentries had already been posted.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov, the commandant," he replied, getting out of the car.

"Password," insisted the voice from the darkness.

"I don't know it yet."

"Then you'll have to move on," growled the sentry.

"I suppose I'll have to," Lubentsov replied cheerfully.

He got back into the car. Ivan turned round and drove back to the main road.

"Let's stop somewhere in the woods for the night."

A few kilometres up the road Ivan turned off and drove into a clump of trees and bushes.

He switched off the engine and sat silent at the wheel for a minute or two, then asked:

"Are you going to eat?"

"I could do with a bite. The Britisher offered me some food but I seemed to have lost my appetite at the time. Are you an early riser?"

"I can get up any time."

"We ought to be on our way before it gets light. It wouldn't do for the Germans to see the commandant sleeping in the woods like a tramp. Bad for prestige."

"It's getting light already."

"We still have an hour or two. It's not four yet."

Thus Lubentsov settled down to spending his first night as commandant of an occupied town. But he could not sleep. For one thing, the back seat of the car did not make a very comfortable bed, and besides his mind was too full of the events of the past twenty-four hours; the many voices he had heard, the torrent of words in Russian and German, the host of impressions gave him no rest. He could not forget the crippled ex-lieutenant who had been taken prisoner near Vyazma. Lubentsov had a very clear memory of Vyazma. His unit had been surrounded there in 1941. He too had been a lieutenant at the time and, like that one-legged man, he might have been captured. What would he have done? Would he also have remained alive, to live in a prison camp, to hobble about on German soil, bitter at heart but outwardly a submissive slave? He understood the bitterness and sadness one could read in the eyes of the one-legged man. The ex-lieutenant was a strong man, the leader of the camp community; had it not been for his bad luck at Vyazma four years ago, it might have been he who now came to Lauterburg as the Soviet commandant. And had the same kind of disaster befallen Lubentsov, might he not be now in the same position as this ex-lieutenant?

No. Lubentsov felt he could never have reconciled himself to such an existence. He would have rotted in jail long ago, or the nazis would have killed him, or else he would have run away. True, you can't run very far with one leg.

But be that as it may, Lubentsov felt a great surge of warmth and compassion for the one-legged lieutenant.

"Life's complicated," he murmured aloud, thinking that by now Ivan was fast asleep.

But Ivan was not asleep. He sighed deeply and said, "You're right."

They said nothing more. Lubentsov lay still, but his eyes would not close. After a while Ivan fell asleep. Lubentsov could tell by his even breathing. He slipped out of the car and strolled off into the woods, picking his way among the smooth boulders scattered on the forest floor. Somewhere nearby he heard the murmur of water, and, walking towards the sound, he came to a steep slope at the foot of which flowed a rushing mountain stream, the foam-flecked water sparkling in the half-light of dawn.

Turning his head, he noticed a road between the trees—the road that had brought them here. He followed it with his eyes to where it dropped in a hairpin turn, and found himself looking down at the red-tile roof of a solitary house some twenty metres below his vantage point. A path led straight to the house. He took it and was soon in a garden looking up at a sign hanging over the ground-floor windows. "White Deer Inn," it read.

The shutters were closed but lights showed through the chinks. He heard a clatter of dishes, and the hum of conversation. Once again he was a scout on a reconnaissance sally, and under cover of the bushes he worked his way round to the front of the house. From here he could see a small garden with several tables, and three motor-cars standing at the front steps. Presently the door opened and several persons appeared. Recognizing Major Fraser among them, Lubentsov instinctively dived behind a bush. But no sooner had he done so than he regretted it; it would hardly do for the Soviet commandant to be found in this rather awkward position. But it was too late to change his mind.

Cursing himself, Lubentsov watched the scene before him through the fragrant branches of a juniper. Major Fraser was with the two blue and khaki English officers he had seen the previous day and several Germans. The baronet had had a drop too much and was not too steady on his feet. "Not very becoming to a commandant either," thought Lubentsov, though he admitted to himself that a drunken commandant was better than a commandant snooping in the bushes.

He had a good view of the party. There was interpreter Kranz, a little old man with a parchment-like face, but with lively eyes and light gait which made him look more like a prematurely aged youth. Another German, wearing a black hat and oversized glasses that covered a good half of his hard, arrogant face, was talking with the British officer in blue—probably in English, for they seemed to manage without an interpreter. Fraser, a drunken smirk on his face, giggled as he fondled the hand of a tall, pretty blonde with her hair piled on top of her head. There were three other women, all young and rather pretty, one of them probably still in her 'teens and very much under the weather.

They came straight towards the juniper. In spite of the early-morning chill in the air Lubentsov broke out in a sweat. Much to his relief, however, the group turned on to a path leading to the edge of the bluff overlooking the river. There they stopped to look at the rising sun. The tall blonde said something, and the British officer in khaki and Kranz hurried back to the inn. A moment later they returned accompanied by a stout man wearing a waistcoat but no jacket and carrying a tray with full wine-glasses. The blonde took one, drank the wine, and then threw the glass down into the gully. The others followed her example. Everybody looked down, evidently watching the glasses fall. The blonde wept a little, promptly powdered her nose, and the party returned to the inn.

Lubentsov got up, made his way through the bushes to the path leading up, and five minutes later reached the car. He woke up Ivan and told him to drive back to town. On reaching the British commandant's office they found Voronin sitting on the front steps. He was smoking and looking about him with a proprietary air, a satisfied expression on his narrow, fox-like face.

"Everything's in order," he said. "The sentries have been posted—attended to it myself. The password and countersign are 'Leningrad—Leipzig.' Where shall we pitch camp? Here?"

"No," Lubentsov said after a moment's thought. "It wouldn't do for the Soviet commandant to establish himself in a 'Brown House,' even a former one."

Both Voronin and Ivan agreed with him.

"There's a house on the square near the church that's just right for the purpose," Voronin said. "It's empty, and nobody round. Enough furniture too to start with. Only the windows are broken, but it won't take long to glass them in."

"I see you've been getting about," Lubentsov said, smiling.

They made the rounds of the factories and warehouses to inspect the sentry posts. And wherever they went, Russian soldiers, looking rather bored and sleepy-eyed, but nevertheless alert, cropped up and challenged them with the invariable "Who goes there?"

Lubentsov was pleased. He felt a warm rush of affection for these men who went about their duties with such matter-of-fact efficiency free of all affectation. Lubentsov wanted to embrace each one of them.

Finally they were back on the square. The building Voronin had chosen proved quite suitable. It was a substantial three-storey structure of grey granite with decorative towers at the corners and caryatids on both sides of the wide doorway.

"Not too frivolous for the commandant's office?" Lubentsov said, glancing up at the stone figures.

"Certainly not," Voronin replied with a grin. "That's art."

"It'll do," Ivan agreed.

Lubentsov's eye caught a printed announcement pasted on to the leg of one of the figures and he went over to read it. It turned out to be an order in German issued by the British commandant warning the local population that with the entry of the Soviet troops anyone found out in the streets after 19:00 hours would be summarily shot. Lubentsov tore the paper down, crumpled it with the intention of throwing it away but changed his mind and put it in his pocket.

Lubentsov and Voronin mounted the wide staircase, which was impressive in spite of the splinters of glass and rubble scattered over it. After going through a good many rooms, Lubentsov said:

"I think it will do."

"It's sturdy enough to withstand a siege if need be," observed Voronin.

"There's a garage for four cars at the back," reported Ivan, who had investigated the courtyard.

"We'll have to find out who owns the place."

"It must have been an institution of some kind."

"Yes, but what?"

"Not a kindergarten, at any rate."

"Probably a bank, judging by the number of safes."

"Empty ones."

"Yes, it does look like a bank."

It was decided to take over the building.

"We've got to let everybody in town know where the commandant's office is going to be," Voronin said.

"They'll find out themselves," Lubentsov said. "We'll put up a flag tomorrow."

"Are we supposed to?"

"Don't know for sure, but I think so."

They wanted to have a wash, but there was no water in any of the dozen bathrooms in the deserted building. There was no electricity either. Voronin went down to the car, took his mess tin, and fetched water from somewhere. The three washed their hands and faces, and sat down at a baize-topped desk for a snack. After the meal, Lubentsov shaved, polished his boots and buttons, and set out once again for the British commandant's office.

He found everything there in a state of unruffled calm. There was no sign of the British having any intention of moving out. Major Fraser was sleeping, but Lubentsov had him wakened. At last he appeared.

"Mr. Kranz," he called when he saw Lubentsov waiting for him. The interpreter appeared promptly.

"I have come to pay a farewell visit," Lubentsov said.

Fraser bowed and asked whether Lubentsov wished to meet the heads of the German local government. Lubentsov said he did, but that he would make the acquaintance of the *bürgermeister* himself, for he could not think of detaining the British officers on that account.

"The bürgermeister happens to be here," Fraser said.

Kranz vanished and re-appeared with a tall German in big horn-rimmed glasses. Lubentsov recognized him at once. It was the man he had seen with the Britishers outside the inn in the hills at dawn that morning.

"Bürgermeister Seelenbach," the tall German introduced himself with a stony look.

Lubentsov ignored him completely. Instead he pulled out of his pocket the order issued by the British commandant which he had removed from the caryatid that morning and asked what this strange announcement might mean. Did the British not know that the curfew in the Soviet zone of occupation was eleven, and not seven o'clock?

Major Fraser shrugged his shoulders.

"Misunderstanding?" Lubentsov queried, uttering the only English word he knew.

Fraser was taken aback. He was certain now that the Soviet commandant understood English and he quickly sought to recall everything that had been said in English in the Soviet commandant's presence the day before. He blushed and suddenly felt very bitter towards the young fair-haired schemer whose unsophistication had been so deceptive. "Dangerous, secretive, malicious, poisoned by their ideology and full of hatred for humanity," was how he qualified the Russians to himself. And the clearer it became that he himself had given the Russian commandant every grounds for suspicion and distrust, and the more dissatisfied he was with himself and his superiors, the more incensed he became against Lubentsov and all Russians and suspicious of their intentions.

It cost him no little effort to invite Lubentsov into his private office where a bottle of spirits and a plate of thin sandwiches stood on the desk.

"I must apologize for the modest fare," he muttered.

Lubentsov turned to Kranz who, also thinking that the Soviet commandant understood English, had not translated the major's apology at once. When the interpreter had put it into Russian, Lubentsov could not help commenting dryly:

"They feed you quite well at the White Deer, don't they?"

Major Fraser blinked. His lips twisted into a sickly smile.

"England is not a rich country," he said.

"Isn't she?" Lubentsov frowned, realizing that Fraser was apologizing not so much for the modesty of his table at this particular moment as for the bare walls he was leaving behind in the one-time "Brown House." Yesterday's incident at the railway station also rankled. "Do

you think we are rich either? You had one Coventry, whereas we had a thousand. But never mind," he interrupted himself with a gesture of finality. "Good-bye and good luck!"

Fraser walked rapidly to the door, followed by the bürgermeister, the interpreter, and Lubentsov. Outside three cars stood at the kerb—the British commandant's car, Lubentsov's, and a little Opel that evidently belonged to the bürgermeister. Major Fraser gave a hurried little bow without looking at anyone in particular, got into his car and drove off.

Voronin, who was standing on the steps, muttered:

"That's that...."

11

"Why is there no water or electricity in the town?" Lubentsov demanded, turning to Seelenbach who was standing on the pavement stiff and erect, hat in hand.

Seelenbach began explaining. Lubentsov understood him well enough, but he patiently heard out Kranz's translation. The town had received its electricity supply from a place which was still in the British zone, the bürgermeister said, and now that the British had withdrawn from Lauterburg they had cut off the supply. When pressed by Lubentsov, he said there was a local electric power plant as well, but it had been seriously damaged; besides, it burned coal which was not to be had now.

"How was it before the war?" Lubentsov asked. "Did the local power station take care of your needs?"

"Only partly. It's a small station—only eight thousand kilowatts."

"How long have you been short of coal?"

Seelenbach did not reply at once. He looked at

Lubentsov. The tall, broad-shouldered Soviet commandant with the candid blue eyes struck him as a nice, simple chap, a lady-killer perhaps, but not too bright. And although the fuel shortage had set in only a few days before, when it became known that the British would be leaving, he replied with a quick glance at Kranz:

"For quite some time now."

Kranz translated.

"So we're doomed to live without electricity, is that it?" Lubentsov smiled. "There are coal mines in the vicinity, aren't there? Where? Only thirty kilometres from here?" Lubentsov chuckled. "All my life I've heard people talk about the efficiency of the Germans, but now I see they were wrong. Herr Seelenbach, I refuse to believe you can't cope with a little problem like that. It's a disgrace, Herr Seelenbach. Downright inefficiency." He waited for Kranz to translate, and noted that the interpreter did a conscientious job of it. "Let's go out to the electric power plant at once and look it over. Come on. *Davai, davai.*"*

Kranz translated but ran into difficulties when it came to the "*davai, davai.*" "Quick, hurry up," he finally essayed a guess at one of the many shades of meaning the word carried, and then added, "Get busy!"

They all got into the bürgermeister's car and crossing the railway tracks headed for the mountains.

Soon they pulled up in front of a small yellow-brick building that really did show signs of war damage. The perfect silence of the place was broken only by the soughing of the trees and the rippling of brooks, and there was no sign of life apart from the sleepy-looking Soviet sentry at the entrance who eyed the newcomers with imperturbable calm. Inside the tile-floored power

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* A colloquial Russian expression, like "Come on" in English.—*Tr.*

house, however, stood two gleaming generators that appeared to be in perfect condition.

"Call the mechanic, please," Lubentsov said.

Seelenbach shrugged his shoulders and looked about him as if expecting the mechanic to appear at any moment. Exchanging a few words with Kranz, he set out down the main road but turned and came back for another whispered conference with the interpreter.

"The mechanic lives in the second house to the left," the sentry said.

Kranz trotted over to the house and returned in ten minutes with a phlegmatic-looking middle-aged man whom he introduced as "Herr Mayer, the mechanic." The mechanic greeted Lubentsov. Kranz translated for the commandant, with Mayer interjecting monosyllabic grunts.

When Lubentsov had told him what was wanted, Mayer explained that all the workers had gone away, he did not know where, and that they were short of coal.

"There's coal down in the gully, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," the sentry put in again.

Lubentsov went over to the edge of the ravine, and the others followed. Mayer looked at the heap of coal and said it was enough to keep the station running three days from night-fall to one o'clock in the morning.

"All right," said Lubentsov. "When can you begin, Herr Mayer?"

"Tomorrow," the mechanic replied.

"You can't do it today?"

Mayer thought it over for a moment before saying, "Why, yes, it can be done."

"Splendid!" cried Lubentsov. "In the meantime we'll see that you get the coal you need. The bürgermeister here will attend to it. In these two or three days he'll have your bunkers overflowing. Right, Herr Seelenbach?"

"*Jawohl*," the bürgermeister said gloomily.

They climbed back into the car, but when Seelenbach told his chauffeur to drive back to town, Lubentsov objected.

"Why back to town? Who's going to attend to the coal? No, my friend, you can't put it off. Let's take a look at the mines."

The car swung around, and skirting the town, followed a road leading down to a stretch of flat country. Villages flashed past, and Lubentsov regretted he did not have the time to stop and see what was going on in each of them.

He showered Kranz with questions, for everything he saw aroused his interest. For instance, the ruins that topped many of the hills overlooking the country. They turned out to be the remnants of baronial castles that had once protected the duchy against brigand raids and peasant revolts.

High above the grain fields hung a cableway suspended from steel towers. Waggonettes which not so long ago had carried copper and iron ore from mines in the mountains to the railway station now hung there motionless, for the mines too were at a standstill. Lubentsov jotted something down in his notebook.

The car made good time, covering the thirty-five kilometres to their destination in half an hour.

"Now where are the pits?" Lubentsov turned to his companions.

It turned out that neither Seelenbach nor Kranz had ever been here before. They came to some long, low sheds standing off the road. Lubentsov told the driver to stop and went over to them. First he looked into what was obviously the office, then into a machine shop, but there was not a soul anywhere. Following a path that led past piles of timber into a stretch of feather-grass and tall ferns that suggested anything but an industrial scene,

he finally came to the brink of a huge oval pit. Railway tracks spiraled down its slopes, and several locomotives and waggons, looking like so many immobile beetles, could be seen standing there. In the sheer uneven sides of the huge open-cut working one could read the geology of these parts—beneath the thin top layer of grey earth overgrown with feather-grass and ferns was a stratum of reddish clay, then a thick one of white sand, and finally a black layer of coal. Here and there the motionless jib of an excavator jutted up. In the middle was a good-sized lake and next to it, the pump-house.

Lubentsov looked back and saw Kranz standing beside him. Seelenbach had lagged behind; he was still struggling through the tall grass.

"So this is the pit," Lubentsov said.

"Yes, sir," said Kranz. "Open cut. They dig brown coal here."

All three returned to the car and drove on to the miners' settlement. It was a typical German village whose only distinguishing feature was the faint smell of crude oil that hung over it.

"Perhaps you can find someone from the pit," Lubentsov said as they stopped at a street crossing. "The manager perhaps."

Seelenbach bowed and walked off up the street.

"What's the matter with him?" Lubentsov asked Kranz, but the interpreter only shrugged his shoulders and smiled politely. "Doesn't seem to have any life in him. What on earth made you elect him?"

"He was appointed by the American Military Government," Kranz explained.

"What's his profession?"

"He owns a shop, a very big shop."

"A shopkeeper, eh?" Lubentsov said.

Kranz did not catch the note of contempt in the commandant's voice. Instead he seemed to be pleased at

being reminded of the Russian word for "shopkeeper" which he had evidently forgotten.

"That's right! A shopkeeper. That's what I wanted to say."

Seelenbach soon returned with the information that the manager had gone to Braunschweig with the British.

"But there must be somebody left?"

"There isn't."

"Impossible. What about the workers?"

"Oh, they're here of course."

"Where can we find them?"

"They live somewhere here, I suppose," Seelenbach said, shrugging his shoulders.

Disgusted with the bürgermeister's helplessness, Lubentsov started down the street. At the next corner he saw a pub with a big yellow sign reading "Glückauf" over the entrance and walked in. The place was packed as if on a holiday.

As Lubentsov entered the men laid down their glasses of pale beer and turned to look at him. Silence fell over the place.

"What's this?" Lubentsov said. "How can you sit here drinking beer when there's coal waiting to be mined!"

What struck the miners most of all was the tone in which he said it, as if he were reproaching them for letting him down personally. Some of the men smiled guiltily.

"You say the manager's run away," he went on, taking a chair. "And you call that a reason. Why, in the Soviet Union the managers skipped it nearly thirty years ago, but coal never stopped being mined."

Kranz, his thin lips smiling, translated. The workers laughed.

"Now let's see what you've got here," Lubentsov continued. "Have you a trade union? Aren't there Communists or Social-Democrats among you? Or haven't

you got a damn thing? What about you, for instance?" He jabbed his finger at a young man, but the latter was too much taken aback to reply. "Come on," he urged, smiling encouragingly, "tell us about yourself."

"I'm a worker," the young man replied in a barely audible voice.

"What about you? And you? And you?" Lubentsov turned to the others.

"Labourer."

"Labourer."

"Excavator operator."

"Miner."

"Mechanic."

"Foreman."

"Any of you Communists?"

No one spoke up.

"We had some Communists once, but that was a long time ago," an old man said.

"Just a moment, Karl," put in his neighbour, a man of about the same age. "We've got one Communist."

"That's right," added a third. "One there is."

"Who?" asked a fourth old man.

"Hans Eperle. Didn't you know?"

Several other old miners added their confirmation.

"Where can I find him?" Lubentsov asked. He liked the way these veterans talked, and it occurred to him that in spite of differences of language and appearance, they were very much like Russian workers.

"I'll go and fetch him," one youngster volunteered and dashed out. In a couple of minutes he was back with a tall, lean man in blue overalls.

"I understand you are a Communist," Lubentsov said.

"That's right. Got back from prison camp a month ago."

Lubentsov found himself looking into a pair of deep, grave eyes. Under other circumstances he would have given way to the awe heroism always inspired in him.

Now, however, the swift tempo of the life he had embarked upon allowed of no such pauses for introspection, no time for reverent reflection, and Lubentsov was keenly sensitive to that tempo. And hence it was with reproaches, questions and suggestions that he now faced Eperle.

"Been back a month, you say. But what have you got to show for it? What have you accomplished in this time, Comrade Eperle? Why isn't anybody working? Why aren't the electric power stations operating and the railways running to schedule? How many Communists do you have here? Six? Why, that's a lot! Quite a lot. And how many Social-Democrats? Thirty! And you've got a trade union too? Seems you've got everything but coal! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

The crowd in the pub had been growing while he spoke.

Some of the miners started to explain that the British had shipped off part of the machinery and that the Henrietta Pit belonged to a mining company which had its headquarters in the British zone of occupation. Nothing had been heard from the head office, the manager had run away, and so on.

"Well, what of it?" Lubentsov was losing his temper. "The workers have remained, haven't they? And the workers are what really matters. When are you Germans going to realize that you can get along without the old company managers?"

In the end it was agreed that the pit would resume work the next day, but hardly had the decision been reached when one of the veteran pit-hands asked:

"What about wages? What are we going to get for it?"

"And food—is there going to be anything in the shops?" another old-timer put in, chewing his lips.

Lubentsov did not quite know what to say. He scowled at the old miners. He did not like their looks at all now.

Just when everything seemed to have been settled so satisfactorily, here they were talking of wages, and supplies, and work clothes, and other mercenary considerations. To hear all this from these German workers whom he had to all intents and purposes generously forgiven their past sins on behalf of the Soviet people, seemed to him to be nothing short of insulting.

The full purport of these "mercenary considerations" Lubentsov came to realize later when he went with Eperle to his home. There he found two little children, a boy and a girl, and a woman of about forty having their dinner. Their food—a mess of acorns and beechnuts called "pelotin"—the threadbare clothes they wore and the squalor of their surroundings spoke of such abject poverty that Lubentsov felt a pang of remorse at the thought of his juvenile outburst of administrative zeal.

It cost him no little effort to suppress the pity he felt for these unfortunate people. He reminded himself of his compatriots at home, the victors in the war, who lived no better, at least in those parts of the Soviet Union which the Wehrmacht had overrun. He reminded himself of all Europe ground down by the hunger and want into which it had been plunged by German aggression. But as justified as all these reflections were, they could not blind him to the fact that the people in the area under his jurisdiction were starving. As a private individual he might tell himself that the Germans had only themselves to blame, but as the commandant he had no right to allow himself to be carried away by personal feelings.

Besides, as he looked at the Eperle family, he realized that he too was hungry, for he had not eaten for quite some time; but he realized, too, that for him it was far easier to satisfy his hunger than it was for the German workers.

After his talk with Eperle, Lubentsov, accompanied by Kranz, returned to the car, where he found Seelenbach

waiting. The bürgermeister, whose existence Lubentsov had completely forgotten, was standing there motionless like a great black crane. Without a word all three got into the car. Lubentsov asked Seelenbach how he proposed to get the coal to the power plant. There were several transport firms in town, the bürgermeister said, but he doubted whether they had the petrol needed. Further questioning elicited the information that there was a synthetic petrol plant in the neighbourhood of Fichtenrode.

"We'll get the petrol," muttered Lubentsov, who remembered that the commandant at Fichtenrode was an acquaintance of his, Major Pigarev, who had formerly served at corps headquarters.

Kranz translated what Lubentsov said with the same ring of conviction in his voice. At the same time he marvelled at the ease with which this Russian got things done; it must have been because he simply could not imagine that there was anything in the world it was impossible to do. Like all Communists, he probably did not believe in God; he believed in progress, and optimism was his creed. Nevertheless the problems confronting him were more complex than he thought, Kranz told himself as he watched Lubentsov out of the corner of his eye.

As for Seelenbach, he too scrutinized the commandant in sullen silence. The Russian had turned out to be a much less simple type than he had thought at first. Or perhaps he *was* simple—the bürgermeister could not make up his mind on that score—but be that as it may, he had something in his training, background and habits, his own specific way of approaching things, that had been completely lacking in the western commandants, who in general had not been interested in getting things done.

Lauterburg came into sight.

12

Voronin stood at the entrance to the commandant's office smoking a cigarette with his usual bored, nonchalant air. Beside him were some Germans who removed their caps when the commandant appeared.

"Our first visitors," Voronin said. "We need an interpreter. Shall I ask Kranz?"

"Certainly not," said Lubentsov. "He was the British choice." With a frowning glance at the interpreter who was standing beside the bürgermeister's car, he added, "But see he gets paid for the work he's done. He'd prefer it in food, I suppose."

"Well, if you don't want him that's your affair. I'll get you another interpreter. There's a Russian girl here who's applying for the job."

Lubentsov went inside. A girl was sitting on a small couch beside the broad staircase. She was smartly dressed and possessed the kind of spectacular good looks that are often mistaken for beauty. She stood up and introduced herself.

"I'm Albina Tereshchenko." She shook Lubentsov's hand heartily and reeled off in one breath, "I was brought here from Kharkov in 1942. Worked as a clerk in a bank. Do you need an interpreter? I speak German quite well and I can type a little German too."

Lubentsov asked her a few questions as they mounted the stairs to his office. He learned that Albina had completed a two-year course at a food industry institute in Kharkov, that she was unmarried and had not been a Komsomol member.

Her features were very striking and only a keen eye might have detected a slightly mean cunning look. She had tiny pearly teeth, delicate features and large, fine eyes. Her skin was very white and her small head swayed on a long graceful neck. The snake-like effect

was heightened by her checked skirt which fitted tightly over her broad hips and flared out at the back.

Lubentsov, however, had neither the time nor the experience to notice such things. He was not unobservant, indeed he believed himself to be something of a physiognomist, but only as regards men. His knowledge of women was very limited. He did not understand them. He liked all women. Indeed he had a weakness for them that was quite natural in a young warm-hearted man.

Albina proved to be an excellent interpreter. She was quick and intelligent, and extremely efficient. In little more than an hour she had transformed the house into an office with a comfortable yet suitably furnished private office for the commandant. Dark-red damask curtains appeared, and carpets to match. Under her guidance, Voronin, Ivan and several German workmen she had hired for the job shifted the furniture, carried in chairs and bookcases, hung up drapes and swept the stairs.

"What about flowers? Would you like some?" she asked Lubentsov as she stood a vase on the window-sill.

"I don't think so," Lubentsov answered absently. "Better to keep the place business-like, don't you think?" He was making notes on his pad, trying to draw up an approximate plan of work for the next few days.

"Quite right," replied Albina and went off with the vase. Returning in a few moments, she went on, "The Germans adore authority, you know." She moved a heavy armchair with gilt lions on the arms closer to the table. "And the harsher the better."

"Do you think so?" Lubentsov looked up.

"Yes. I know them. The tougher you are with them the more they respect you. They respect the British because the British look down on them and treat them like dirt. They have less respect for the Americans; too familiar. But they don't respect Russians at all, because they're

always being democratic in the wrong places. It's funny to see Russians, after all they've been through, slapping Germans on the back like old pals. Even Russian Jews do it, I've seen them myself."

She spoke Russian with a southern accent in a low, husky, caressing voice, and she had a trick of letting her sentences trail off at the end which was most charming. In spite of her youth—she was only twenty-four—Lubentsov noticed a fine web of tiny wrinkles and violet shadows under her eyes as if she had not slept for many nights.

"There are all sorts of Germans," said Lubentsov. "Besides, it's very pleasant to be generous."

"You're right," she agreed unexpectedly. And changing the subject quickly, she asked, "Where are you going to live?"

"Here somewhere. There's plenty of room here surely."

"That won't do. This is an office, and the commandant's office besides. You'll be much more comfortable in a private flat. You will feel more at ease."

"I daresay you're right," Lubentsov agreed after considering this for a moment.

He returned to his plan, looking up occasionally to watch her flitting about issuing instructions to Voronin and Ivan. Ivan willingly did as he was told, but Voronin went about as black as a thunder-cloud. Each time Albina issued some order he would glance questioningly at Lubentsov expecting him to object. But Lubentsov would nod his head absently or murmur, "Go ahead, go ahead."

He could not concentrate on his work for some reason. He was vaguely conscious that something was missing, but it was some time before he realized that it was a telephone. When he mentioned it to Albina, she flushed with chagrin at not having thought of it herself.

"I'll attend to it at once," she said.

She put on her hat and went out. Shortly afterwards several quiet, respectful workmen came and installed telephones in a number of rooms. They put two in Lubentsov's private office—a white one with red press buttons, and a black one with white buttons. The room at once assumed an even more dignified, business-like air.

Lubentsov asked Albina to connect him with Altstadt. She picked up the receiver, announced "*hier Kommandantur*" in an important voice, smiled at Lubentsov and launched into a torrent of German. A few minutes later the Altstadt telephone exchange answered and in another minute General Kuprianov was on the wire.

"I see," he said, after Lubentsov had reported on the situation. "I shall take steps in the matter of the mines and railways. Of course it won't all be plain sailing. You and I haven't had any experience in this sort of work. I've got my hands full here too. The important thing is to get to know the Germans better. Get in touch with the anti-fascist parties. Have you any Communists there? Find them, find them! Marshal Zhukov has approved the staffs. You are to get a few officers and a platoon of soldiers. I'll send them along as soon as they arrive. In the meantime you can use soldiers from army units stationed there. They'll let you have them if you ask for them. Instructions will follow in due course. I have a heap of them here already."

Lubentsov hung up the receiver and went to look over the house. The cleaning job was nearing completion. In the large, sombre ante-room adjoining his private office a gaunt German was polishing the floor. Glaziers were putting in window-panes. From the hall below came Albina's husky voice. She was talking to some Germans who had been waiting outside the entrance.

"Not today, not today. I've told you five times. Come tomorrow," she said brusquely as she hustled them out.

Lubentsov, leaning over the oaken banisters of the wide staircase, called Albina and asked her to connect him with the commandant at Fichtenrode.

"His name is Pigarev, Pavel Petrovich. A friend of mine. While you're telephoning I'll go and get something to eat. I can't remember when I ate last."

He had a hasty snack with Voronin and went upstairs again. The floor in his private office was being washed. Albina had not been able to get in touch with Pigarev because the Fichtenrode commandant's office had no telephone yet. Lubentsov heard this with a certain amount of satisfaction. He went out, walked across the square and stood for a while under the trees in the small garden. He remembered what General Kuprianov had said about "finding" German Communists and he chuckled. It struck him as comical that they should be searched for. He regretted that he had not questioned Eperle more thoroughly on this score.

Were there any Communists left in Germany at all, he wondered. Passing the church, he turned left into a side-street. The houses stood dark and silent. Before long he came to a small square in the middle of which stood the town hall, an old-style building crowned by two small towers and with carved wooden figures under the eaves. Lubentsov went inside the building. Here too everything was silent and deserted. Coming outside again, he found Voronin standing at the entrance.

"Hullo!" he said in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"I've been trailing you."

"What for?"

"Just in case. We're not exactly at home here, are we?"

They walked back across the square in silence. As they turned a corner several figures detached themselves from the buildings on either side of the road and came towards them. Lubentsov halted. The people advanced

slowly and, it seemed to him, threateningly. It was a narrow, gloomy street and the shadows of evening were thickening.

"I'll fix them," said Voronin, tightening his grip on the sub-machine-gun, his face a stony mask of hatred.

"Wait," Lubentsov ordered curtly.

He searched the faces of the people approaching him. They too scrutinized him closely. At last one of them asked whether they had the honour of addressing the Soviet commandant and when Lubentsov replied in the affirmative, a woman with a worn but handsome face framed in white hair stepped forward and began to speak in quite fluent Russian. She had lived in Moscow for four years, she said. She was so overcome with emotion, however, that she could only repeat over and over again that she had lived in Moscow for four years, from 1925 to 1930. Then she broke off and, peering into Lubentsov's face, said with a sudden note of alarm in her voice:

"Ah, but you are too young.... Too young to remember...."

"Be so good as to tell me who you are and what you want of me," Lubentsov said.

At first he did not grasp what she was saying, but then he understood. This little group of people before him was none other than the leading five-member cell of the local Communist Party organization. It seemed nothing short of a miracle that he should have chanced upon the very people he had sought. He did not realize that he had found the Communists only because they had been looking for him no less than he for them. He did not know that they had spent the entire day trying to see him at the office, that they had followed him to the power station but had missed him, and that when they had returned to the office Albina had refused to admit them.

The woman, whose name was Hanna Nebel and whom

the others affectionately dubbed "Mutti," invited Lubentsov to her place which was nearby. Her tiny attic room could barely accommodate all seven of them. The Five consisted of Hanna, two elderly men, Karl Wandergast and Kurt Lerche, and two younger men, Rudi Vorländer and Otto Langheinrich.

After the first few minutes of conversation, Voronin, who had been eyeing the group with gloomy suspicion, reluctantly took his hand off his sub-machine-gun and then slung it over his shoulder. He might have disbelieved each of them individually—a man can invent any sort of story about himself and get away with it—but five people together cannot lie, at any rate not convincingly enough to evoke such pain and joy, such heartache and sympathy in their listeners.

Wandergast and Lerche had recently returned from concentration camps—the one from Mauthausen, the other from Sachsenhausen. Vorländer, after three years in jail, had been drafted into the army, had helped build the Atlantic Wall and had been sent from there to a penal battalion known as the *Himmelsfahrtkommando* ("Kingdom Come" Commando) for anti-war propaganda. After being wounded he had been sent back to a labour battalion, but had soon escaped and gone into hiding not far from Lauterburg, in a hut on an estate where his wife's brother worked as gardener. Langheinrich, a huge silent peasant with a plain, honest face, had also been in prison for four years. Later he had worked at a cement factory in the Harz and now lived in the village of Finkendorf. In July 1944 he had been picked up again during the wave of arrests that followed the attempt on Hitler's life. As for Mutti, she had the biggest prison record of them all, having spent most of the nazi years in concentration camps.

They had set up an anti-fascist resistance committee in Lauterburg. As soon as the Americans had arrived,

the Five had written an appeal to the population. The appeal had been printed and posted up in the streets, but the American patrols had torn it down.

"They forced us underground again," said Lerche. "Yes, yes, Comrade. Our people, realizing that they had been misled by Hitler, were ready to join us anti-fascists. But the Americans did their best to discredit us. Faith in nazism was gone, and there was nothing to take its place. That is bad, a nation without faith is dangerous. But it was a definite policy to leave our people without any faith whatever."

"The Americans put nazi officials in charge of clearing away the debris from the streets," Wandergast put in.

"There, you see!" exclaimed Lerche. "And when Wandergast and I went to the American commandant to complain about it we were thrown out. Yes, yes, Comrade. We, anti-fascists, were thrown out of the American commandant's office! They actually threatened to beat us up! As if we could be afraid of beatings!"

"That's all over and done with," Langheinrich muttered placatingly.

"You're too good-natured, Langheinrich," cried Lerche. "Such things can't be forgotten. They treated the nazis like princes, but we were slighted at every step. Whom did they appoint bürgermeister? Seelenbach, who used to sell the foul writings of Hitler and his gang. They wouldn't provide living quarters for anti-fascists returning from concentration camps, but the houses of former nazis were standing empty, and they took them under their protection! We were driven underground, but Distelberg the fascist was allowed to keep his sausage factory!"

"It was a hard time," Mutti said quietly. "Perhaps harder even than under Hitler. A time of terrible disillusionment and doubts. I often thought that perhaps we

were no longer of any use to anybody. Who were we, after all? Ghosts of the past?"

"Now then, Mutti," muttered Langheinrich. "You always like to complicate things."

"I like the truth."

"But you mustn't think we spent our days brooding over things," Wandergast said. "We did what we could."

"Less than we could," observed Vorländer.

"Yes, we did less than we could, but we did something. We contacted Communists and sympathizers among the workers. The agricultural labourers, too. We managed to get Vorländer a job in the local police force. Thanks to him several profiteers and nazis were arrested. When we heard that you were coming, we set up civilian guards at several factories and stores to prevent them from being looted. We hid some of the art treasures from the castle. Not all, unfortunately. But we did save something, and what is most important...." Wandergast suddenly began to tremble all over with emotion. He raised his right hand clenched in a fist and Lubentsov noticed for the first time that his hand was horribly scarred. "What is most important, we have preserved our faith in the future. Yes, we have preserved that in spite of everything.... Translate that to the comrade, Hanna, please."

"I understand," Lubentsov hastened to assure him.

He did not know what to say at that solemn moment. Just then the room burst into bright light. They all looked up in surprise: the electric bulb under the ceiling had flashed on.

"Good for Mayer, he has kept his word!" cried Lubentsov. He got up. "I must be going," he said. "There is much to be done. We must meet again soon. From now on we shall work together."

13

"Damn it!" he said when they were outside in the street, "I ought to have said something inspiring to them, but I could not think of anything. I ought to have shaken hands with them at least."

He was displeased with himself. But Voronin, who took a more practical view of things, disagreed.

"It's all right, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel. It's enough that you went to see them. That is a political act in itself."

As they approached their quarters, Albina's voice reached them through the open windows. She was speaking on the telephone, first in German, then in Russian. Lubentsov and Voronin entered the building. It was very quiet inside. The workers had gone and everything was in perfect order.

Albina was talking on the phone to Pigarev and flirting for all she was worth. When she saw Lubentsov she stopped short and said in an official tone: "Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov will speak to you."

"Hullo there, Pigarev," said Lubentsov. "How goes it? Settled down? Same here. Got things going fine. We have everything here except petrol. You've got plenty of that, though. What, don't you know? Well, I'm telling you. There's a synthetic petrol factory within five kilometres of Fichtenrode."

"All right, I'll let you have some if you'll send for it," said Pigarev.

Lubentsov telephoned at once to Seelenbach, but the bürgermeister was not in his office. He called his home number and was told that Seelenbach was resting.

"Please wake him up and tell him to be here in half an hour," said Lubentsov.

Albina translated this message to Seelenbach's wife with undisguised pleasure.

The bürgermeister arrived fifteen minutes later. Albina announced him.

"Show him in," said Lubentsov.

"Better let him wait about ten minutes. I told him you are very busy."

Lubentsov laughed. "Show him in," he repeated.

Seelenbach came in and bowed.

"Send some lorries to Fichtenrode for petrol tomorrow morning. Ask for Major Pigarev, the commandant. Have you spoken with the transport people? You haven't? Now look here, that won't do! You will please summon the carters at once and give them the necessary instructions. Not tomorrow, now! In general I must say your office hours are far too short. That applies to all the town officials. When the city lies in ruins, when there's nothing to eat and when the people are suffering, the town council has no right to close at five in the afternoon. Tomorrow morning everybody in town, including the bourgeoisie, must get to work and clear away the ruins. Traffic will be permitted to circulate until 11 o'clock at night. All pubs, cafés and other such places are to be opened. All of them. You may go."

But Seelenbach did not go.

"I know there are plenty of complaints against me," he began in a tone of suppressed agitation. "That is only to be expected in such difficult times.... I have always done my best to carry out the orders of the occupation authorities. I have tried hard, very hard ... to do my job well.... I shall continue in the future...."

Lubentsov cut him short, "It is too late to speak of these things now." He saw that this might sound ambiguous, and he corrected himself, "Too late, I mean, in the sense that the hour is late. I did not sleep at all last night."

When the door had closed behind the bürgermeister, Lubentsov turned to Voronin.

"Make me up a bed somewhere, please."

But Albina protested. "Oh, you can't sleep here, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," she said. "I'll tell you what. Come to my place for the time being. I have a good flat. You can stay there tonight, and tomorrow I'll find something for you. There is General von Lippe's house, for instance, a posh place. The general ran away."

Lubentsov smiled. "It wouldn't be right for a lieutenant-colonel to sleep in a general's bed."

"On the contrary," she cried, "it would raise your prestige with the Germans enormously."

At that moment she was called away.

"A smart wench," remarked Voronin.

"Yes, she knows her way around all right," Lubentsov agreed. "You don't like her much, do you?"

Voronin ignored the question. "Well," he asked, "shall I call Ivan? Are you going to her place?"

Lubentsov laughed. "No, don't be afraid, I'm not going."

Voronin grinned and went off to make up a bed for the commandant. He was thus engaged when Albina came in.

"Who's that for?" she demanded.

"Who do you think?" Voronin returned not without malice. "Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov, the City Commandant."

"Nonsense. He's coming with me. The commandant can't sleep like that. It's bad for his prestige."

"Blast his prestige! This is none of your business, my girl. No interpreting needed here."

Albina's eyes flashed, but she controlled herself. She walked up to Voronin, ruffled his hair and said playfully, "Awfully strait-laced, aren't we? Like a monk."

Her voice purred. Voronin in spite of himself seized her by the shoulders, but she broke away from him.

"Naughty, naughty!" she said, shaking a finger at him. "Take care or I'll complain to the commandant."

Voronin cursed under his breath and said with unwilling admiration, "You little devil!"

"Don't worry, I'll find a girl for you," said Albina patting her hair. "A smashing one too. Any nationality you wish. But you mustn't touch me. I'm *ausgeschlossen* for you!"

"Oh, go to blazes," growled Voronin.

She stood for a moment watching him spread a greatcoat and a thin blanket on the couch, then with a scornful shake of her head she said, "Go away, I'll do it myself."

Instead, however, she went over to the telephone, called a number and spoke to someone in German. Then she went out on the balcony and beckoned to Voronin to follow her. A few minutes later a car pulled up in front. Two German women alighted carrying two enormous bundles which turned out to contain blankets, pillows, sheets and towels. Voronin noticed that one of the two, a plump, middle-aged woman, spoke most respectfully to Albina, bowing and pressing her hands to her ample bosom while Albina replied briefly and none too politely.

"*Gut, gut,*" she repeated in a chilly voice.

The other woman, a sharp-eyed servant girl, stood by watching Albina and Voronin with a mixture of fear and curiosity.

When they had driven off Albina turned to Voronin, her eyes shining with triumph.

"Now she's ready to lick my boots, the old crow," she said.

"Who was that?" Voronin asked.

"Frau Bottcher. She owns a haberdashery shop. I worked for her once. A nasty bitch."

It was two o'clock before Lubentsov finally got to bed. He could not fall asleep for a long time—an endless suc-

cession of faces and snatches of scenery passed before his closed eyes as if he were driving on and on to some unknown destination. He had not lived at such high tension even at the front.

He slept badly.

All night long he was haunted by dreams in which reality and unreality were fantastically intertwined.

In the morning reality returned, but a reality so remote from all of Sergei Lubentsov's past life that it was more like a dream. An endless stream of tradesmen, manufacturers, ex-nazis, railway officials, pastors, men and women of all nationalities who had been shipped to Germany by Hitler from all parts of Europe passed before him. They came asking for living quarters, for firewood, for fuel, for window-glass, for automobile licenses, for permission to return home, for exemption from billeting regulations; they came with complaints against the British for failing to pay some bill, against the Russians for taking something, against the Americans for having gone off with something else, against the French for outwitting somebody; displaced persons came to demand that the Germans be called to order, the Germans wanted the D.P.s kept in hand; employees asked for protection against the employers, the employers for protection against the demands of the employees. Grim-faced and smiling, emaciated and stout, old and young, one after another they came before the commandant, each with his own concerns, his own troubles, his own manner of speaking, of showing his fear or his joy.

Lubentsov felt like a swimmer in a stormy sea who can do little more than keep his head above water. And the flood of visitors continued. It was all very interesting, but he soon realized that this could not go on; he could never hope to take charge of the situation if he was to be merely an executive attending to the individual needs of endless numbers of petitioners.

Seelenbach sent everybody to him without exception. The result was that a long queue like a bread-line stretched from the town hall, through the streets and the bombed sites, all the way to the commandant's office. And the square outside the commandant's office began to resemble a market-place.

Voronin had at first been inclined to approve of the bürgermeister's reluctance to take any decision without the knowledge of the commandant. But the longer this went on the gloomier Lubentsov grew whenever Voronin broached the subject. By the end of the day, as they were snatching a hasty dinner, Lubentsov finally lost patience.

"I'm afraid Seelenbach is leading us by the nose," he burst out. "He's shifting everything on my shoulders. I don't know what to do. If the other officers don't turn up soon I'll be swamped."

Albina laughed. "Why don't you introduce definite reception hours?" she said.

It was a simple enough solution, but to Lubentsov who had never been a bureaucrat it seemed quite brilliant. He now would have time to study his district and to see the people he really had to see.

The next morning he called a conference of the leaders of the four political parties permitted by the Allied Supreme Command. The Communist Party was represented by Kurt Lerche, whom Lubentsov had met two days before. An undefinable change had taken place in Lerche since then. His face was as pale and withdrawn as before, he wore the same shabby clothes—a short jacket and nondescript trousers, badly frayed at the turn-ups, and a woollen jersey crudely patched in many places. But his voice had acquired a harsh metallic ring and there was more confidence in his manner. The others were clearly afraid of him, especially Franz Jost, the Social-Democrat leader, whom Lerche treated with unconcealed hostility. More than once during the conference

he spoke ominously of "the traitors who put Hitler into power," and Jost, for whom these terrible words were clearly intended, cowered and fidgeted in his seat, throwing worried glances in Lubentsov's direction.

Lubentsov sympathized with Lerche, for he harboured a deep-seated dislike for the German Social-Democrats himself.

But he tried his best to be unbiassed, remembering that he was primarily the commandant, an administrative official.

And so he was careful to treat all four party leaders alike.

The Christian Democratic Union was represented by Erich Grellmann, a veterinary surgeon, a tall, heavily-built man of advanced years with long grey hair; the Liberal Democrats—by Hugo Mauritius, a partner in the large tailoring firm of Müller and Mauritius, a dapper, youthful-looking man of about fifty with aristocratic features.

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After he had seated the four and exchanged a few polite words with each, Lubentsov found himself at a loss to know where to begin. He was not acquainted with the programmes of the parties, their relations with one another were a closed book to him, and, being accustomed to a one-party system at home, he could not see the need for so many parties if they all were working for the same end—to rebuild Germany on a new foundation and free it of all traces of nazism and aggression.

The visitors themselves came to his rescue by asking permission to set forth their needs and wishes. Having no doubt that the commandant was a Communist himself, they let Lerche present his case first.

Lerche began with an attack on Seelenbach and the way the municipal government was run, and complained about the difficult position in which the Communist Party had been placed by "all these gentlemen" who had enjoyed the patronage first of the American and then the British commandant. On the whole he was right, but for all that much of what he said irritated Lubentsov. To begin with, he considered it tactless and unwise to harp on the fact that now, as it were, the "tables were turned," that the Soviet authorities would give their support primarily to the Communist Party. Besides, Lerche tended to be flowery, using expressions such as "crying facts," "the die has been cast," and so on.

To show the others how close his relations were with the commandant, Lerche casually mentioned that Karl (meaning Wandergast) and Mutti had been called to Halle where they probably would take up posts in the provincial government.

In spite of Lerche's grim tenseness, Lubentsov discerned something juvenile in his behaviour and could not help feeling sorry for the man. After the years of humiliation he had lived through, he could hardly be blamed for wanting to flaunt his triumph before "these gentlemen." For this was truly a triumph for him, and dressed though he was in rags he carried himself as if he wore the robes of state. And strange as it was, it was this touch of childishness so unexpected in this otherwise grim and bitter man that won him Lubentsov's sympathy.

Grellmann spoke next. He took up Seelenbach's defence, claiming that the bürgermeister had been involved in the Conspiracy of July 20; a relative of his had sheltered an American airman in Dessau; and if he had refused to give the Communist Party premises and committed other such offences, it was because the comman-

dants—"the commandants who were here before you"—had ordered him to do so.

Mauritius spoke in a jocular vein. Jost was silent. All waited to hear what the commandant would say. Lubentsov began by noting that the material conditions of life in the town and district were hard indeed, the population was short of fuel, many lived in crude shelters among the ruins. The streets were being cleared at an exceedingly slow pace. Among the population there was confusion, bewilderment, despondency. All parties had to work together in order to improve the situation and activize the anti-fascist forces.

As regards the bürgermeister, the question was not whether he had done his job well or poorly in the past, Lubentsov went on, but whether he would cope with his tasks in the future. He suggested that a meeting of anti-fascists be called to decide this matter. It might be advisable to choose a younger and more energetic man than Herr Seelenbach for the post, though he had nothing against him personally.

I'm becoming quite a diplomat, Lubentsov congratulated himself but with the same wistful feeling as people note that they are growing old.

When Albina had translated, Lubentsov wound up by saying that the nazis and those who aided and abetted them could not expect any leniency. He rose to indicate that the interview was over. Three of his visitors also got up, but Jost remained seated. His face flushed at the commandant's closing words which he took, and not without reason, to be addressed to himself.

"You are quite right," he said nervously. "All anti-fascists must join forces now—especially the two workers' parties. We both were victims of the terror."

Seeing that Lubentsov was not listening to him, Jost went over to Albina and whispered something in her ear. In the meantime Lubentsov, who was showing the

others out, turned back at the door to ask Albina in Russian:

"What does he want?"

"He's complaining about that one," Albina replied in Russian, indicating Lerche. "Says he was in a concentration camp too."

Lubentsov threw a suspicious look at Jost, who, evidently gathering that they were talking about him, burst out:

"Five years! I spent five years in Sachsenhausen! Together with Kurt too. Shared the same barrack with him." And he jabbed a finger at Lerche's shoulder. There was a hurt look on his face.

Lubentsov looked questioningly at Lerche.

"True enough," Lerche growled. "But if it hadn't been for them, there never would have been concentration camps in Germany."

A tough nut to crack, Lubentsov thought to himself as he accompanied the group to the outer office. While shaking hands with them, he turned to Mauritius.

"I noticed you looking at Herr Lerche with a professional eye, Herr Mauritius. You're right, he is badly in need of a suit of clothes. I would ask you to be so kind as to see to it that anti-fascists in need of clothes are provided for as soon as possible."

Mauritius smiled and bowed.

"I shall attend to it," he said.

After the meeting Lubentsov made a trip into the countryside. It was a rich, fertile region, densely populated, and with the exception of the town itself had suffered no war damage. The western section was hilly, wooded country, and the eastern, lowland part, was covered with grain fields, gardens and orchards.

For three days running Lubentsov, accompanied by Albina, toured the area, taking different roads each time, and returning late at night. He stopped in the villages,

at the mines and factories, drank beer at village *Gasthofs* where the peasants gathered in the evenings, talked with local bürgermeisters and party leaders and jotted everything down into his notebook, which soon turned into a voluminous record of life in Lauterburg district and its problems.

Later he was praised for these incessant trips, encounters and interviews, for his striving to see everything for himself and to go into everything on the spot, for having adopted the "proper style of work," as it was called, from the start. But actually this "style" took shape without any conscious effort on his part. It sprang from his eager interest in the life round him. The schedules he drew up for himself every day were largely lists of things to look into, and wherever he looked into something he never failed to correct that which required correcting.

Each day, on returning to his office, his first question to Voronin would be whether the officers General Kuprianov had promised a week ago had arrived. They had not, and Lubentsov kept calling up Altstadt to find out why.

On the third evening, however, when he drove up to the office he found Voronin waiting for him on the steps.

"They're arriving tomorrow," Voronin announced.

"Definitely?"

"Definitely. General Kuprianov himself telephoned and said so."

On the way upstairs Lubentsov asked Voronin for a report of the day's happenings, and the latter read out a list of the people who called or phoned.

Lerche had called during the day (he was wearing a new suit, Voronin observed). Superintendent Klaustal, the head of the local Lutheran Church, had asked for an appointment. The proprietor of a cinema theatre had been in at least three times with a list of the films he

wanted to show. A workers' delegation from the electric motor works had called. So had Colonel Sokolov, the commander of the regiment stationed in the environs who had detailed some of his men for sentry duty on Voronin's request; he had wanted to make the commandant's acquaintance.

"What did Lerche want?"

"They've chosen Vorländer bürgermeister—that's the tall, lanky one, remember?—and he wanted to ask you to confirm the election."

Lubentsov turned to Albina who was following them.

"Please let them know that Vorländer's acceptable," he said.

"Very well," replied Albina.

All three entered the commandant's private office. Albina took off her hat and, producing a writing pad, sat down on a chair next to the window-sill and began writing busily in the waning light.

Lubentsov ran his eye over the list of callers.

"What did you tell them?" he asked Voronin.

"Depends whom," Voronin chuckled. "I told the workers to come again later in the evening, the capitalists that you wouldn't be round for the next few days, Colonel Sokolov that you would pay him a visit, and the priest to telephone to you."

"And who did the interpreting?"

Voronin looked sheepish.

"There was nobody else so I called in old Kranz," he said guiltily.

Lubentsov frowned.

"See that it doesn't happen again." After a moment's silence he continued, "What about the streets? Any progress?"

"They're clearing them up, though I can't say they're showing much enthusiasm."

Albina sat in her corner gazing at Lubentsov with adoring eyes. That look, which he had noticed during their motor trips to various parts of the district, had begun to disturb Lubentsov; it was so eloquent and unmistakable that he could not help being affected by it. It was too candid to be expressive of any genuine feeling, but Lubentsov, lacking any experience in such matters, believed it to be bona fide. He felt almost guilty for being unable, for having indeed no right, to reciprocate Albina's feeling.

As for Albina, she could not understand the commandant's behaviour. His reserved manner towards her and his resistance to her charms puzzled her. Thinking that perhaps she was too lively and vivacious for his taste, she had changed her tactics and assumed a silent, pensive mien, trying to give her eyes a dreamy look. But this too failed to produce the desired effect.

Another thing about him that astounded her was his complete lack of interest in the good things of life to which she herself attached so much importance. It was true that she had been brought to Germany from Kharkov in 1942, but she had been a not unwilling captive, for she believed that if you used your brains you could do better for yourself in Germany than in occupied Kharkov. True, she was bitterly disappointed, for she had had her share of misery here. But now that she was free again, all her efforts were concentrated on making up for lost time. At the moment she had been too busy touring the district with Lubentsov to take full advantage of her position as the personal interpreter and confidential secretary of the commandant. Nevertheless her time had not been altogether wasted. The proprietors of a number of firms had already begun to supply her regularly with diverse goods. At the first rumour of the approach of Soviet troops, the flat she occupied in the bookseller's house had become so stuffed with knick-knacks, furniture,

radios and similar offerings that it looked like a second-hand shop.

The commandant's utter lack of self-interest amazed Albina. She stopped talking about finding a flat for him. She was only too glad that he had not asked where the bedding he slept on had come from. At the same time, she admired him profoundly for being what he was. To her he seemed something like a saint. No one admires asceticism more than those who are incapable of it; no one respects generosity more than misers and money-grubbers. Lubentsov, who considered himself a sober, practical-minded, prosaic sort of person, seemed to Albina to be a unique character, a poetic soul. What was perfectly natural to him was quite incomprehensible to her. These two individuals represented two completely opposite outlooks and in this sense Lubentsov was more remote from Albina than she was from the anthropoid ape.

15

Voronin woke Lubentsov early in the morning.

"The officers are here."

Lubentsov jumped up, dressed quickly and went to his office where the new arrivals were waiting for him. As he opened the door three men in army greatcoats rose from the sofa, saluted, and introduced themselves.

"Only three of you?" Lubentsov asked. "Is that all they could spare? Take off your coats, Comrades." He called Voronin and asked him to bring in some breakfast. When the officers were settled on the sofa, he pulled up a chair and sat down facing them. Most of all he wanted to avoid being formal; because of this he did not take his usual seat behind the desk; and did not ask them about their background, past experience and the other things

which usually come up when a superior officer first meets his subordinates. Instead, he wanted to make them feel from the outset that as members of a tiny Soviet colony in a German town they were more than colleagues in line of duty, that they had to be friends, united by devotion to the same ideal. He talked to them about Lauterburg and the surrounding area, about the different kinds of Germans he had met, and the problems confronting the commandant. Neither did he conceal the fact that the Germans, apprehensive of the Russians everywhere—and not without reason—were particularly frightened in these parts, a state of affairs that was due in large measure to the curious propaganda spread by the allied occupation authorities.

As he spoke he examined the newcomers closely. Past experience had taught him that most men could be classified in a few basic categories, and he wondered to which his new aides belonged.

Major Kasatkin, who had been recommended for the post of deputy commandant, was a stocky, taciturn man in his late forties. His rather handsome face with regular features and steady, somewhat heavy-lidded eyes suggested impeccable if strait-laced and pedantic honesty. He did not smile often, but when he did, it was a warm, pleasant smile. At any rate there was something about his sturdy figure that inspired confidence.

Captain Chegodayev was a giant of a man, too corpulent for his thirty years, and with a face too big for his eyes, nose and mouth. He was of a jolly disposition, and although he was rather restrained in the presence of his new chief, it was easy to see that in normal surroundings his laughter would make the windows rattle. Laughing, he explained that he had been appointed agricultural officer, the joke being that he had never had anything to do with farming. Before the war he had worked in the planning department of a factory. True, the plant had

manufactured agricultural machines, which probably explained his present assignment.

The third officer—Senior Lieutenant Menshov—had worked before the war in a rural district Komsomol Committee, and prior to that had been a lathe operator. Now he had been appointed industrial officer at Lauterburg—again an obvious error in judgement, for he had long since forgotten whatever he had known about metalworking, whereas agriculture was his *métier.*

"Evidently you'll have to change about," Lubentsov said. "I'll take it up with the general today."

In the meantime Voronin and Ivan had run into difficulties with the breakfast, and after a while they called Lubentsov into the next room to tell him their supplies were exhausted. They would have to drive down to the regiment stationed out of town and collect their rations from the stores. At this point Albina came in.

"There's a German restaurant down the street," she said with a smile on learning of the difficulty. "I'm sure Herr Pingel, the proprietor, would be happy to cater to the commandant and his staff."

She went out with Ivan, and soon the latter returned with a young girl wearing a white apron and carrying a tray covered with a napkin. The dish turned out to be a local delicacy—steamed trout.

The waitress was followed by Herr Pingel himself, an undersized man with a limp, all politeness, who suggested that the Soviet officers draw up a menu for a whole week in advance to make it easier for him to cater to their needs. He was glib but not offensively so, though he did not miss the opportunity to ask for a license to purchase additional supplies of meat, milk and bread for the Soviet officers, which after all was only natural under the circumstances.

Lubentsov noticed his limp and asked:

"You were in the war?"

"I was wounded on the Eastern Front," said Herr Pingel, drawing himself up. There was a note of pride in his voice, as if he were lauding the Russians for this accomplishment.

"Which army were you in?"

"The Second Armoured."

"Ah, with Heinz Guderian!"

"Yes, sir."

Lubentsov had known Colonel-General Guderian's Second Armoured Army very well.

The Second Armoured had moved in as far as the Smolensk-Roslavl line, and then had been sent down south to the Ukraine. From here it was transferred to Orel and then to Tula, where together with much of its materiel and men it lost the punch on which "fleet-footed Heinz," as the panzer corps men had called their commander, had prided himself. Because he had withdrawn without permission, Guderian had been deprived of his command by Hitler and transferred to the land forces reserve. And this little Herr Pingel had been wounded at Tula, had had his legs frozen and ended up in hospital.

It seemed strange that this man who had so many human lives and destroyed homes on his conscience should now be standing there by the table with a napkin on his arm—a peaceful, lame, smiling, quite pleasant-looking and life-loving German. He was smiling, but it was not an ingratiating smile; his was the professional courtesy of the caterer dealing with a customer.

Stranger still was the fact that Lubentsov did not feel any hostility towards the German, although those large black bulging eyes had looked out from the turret of a Wehrmacht tank at the very same towns and villages he himself had defended in that grim year of 1941. As a turret gunner Pingel had fired in cold blood at things most precious to Lubentsov, at Lubentsov's compatriots who had never done Pingel any harm. No doubt he had

been proud of hailing from Lauterburg and had looked at the alien towns he had helped the Wehrmacht seize and at the people living in them with contempt.

Now it was Lubentsov's duty to think of the welfare of this German and all the other citizens of Lauterburg. And perhaps the strangest thing of all was that Lubentsov had applied himself to this task with the same zeal and thoroughness as a few months before he had sought to kill men like Pingel.

If the talk with the former panzer corps man struck some emotional chord deep down in Lubentsov's heart, the same could not be said of Major Kasatkin, who listened to the conversation with tightly compressed lips. When the German had gone, Kasatkin looked at Lubentsov with a frown.

"They're all jolly good fellows now," he said.

Lubentsov felt uneasy at the note of reproach in these words and realized there was some justification for it. There really was no reason to get sentimental at the sight of a former turret gunner serving trout to his former enemies.

The officers had finished their breakfast and Voronin was clearing the table when Albina returned to announce that there were a great many people in the outer office waiting to see the commandant. She particularly mentioned one Frau Lüttwitz, putting so much emphasis on the name that Lubentsov felt he had to receive her first. He recognized her as soon as she entered. It was the woman he had seen with Major Fraser at the inn in the hills, the woman who had thrown her champagne glass into the gully and sobbed, evidently because the British were leaving.

Today she was a little embarrassed, or pretended to be. She was tall and handsome, with a good figure and dressed with excellent taste. The fragrance of some elusive scent was wafted in with her. She sat down in a

low armchair next to the commandant's desk, crossed her ankles and rested a shapely arm casually on the green top of the desk. It was a very white arm, and its pose was studiedly languorous. And although she spoke with great earnestness, it was clear that she felt that her appearance was far more eloquent than her words.

Kasatkin lit a cigarette and turned to look out of the window. The same could not be said of Menshov and Chegodayev, who could not take their eyes off the visitor.

Lubentsov adopted a purely official, formal tone, though it cost him some effort to do so. At first he did not catch what the visitor wanted. All he understood was that she had brought some samples of the output of a firm of which she was the owner—it had been founded nearly 100 years ago and had once been well known on the foreign market.

"What sort of factory is it?" he asked Albina.

"A distillery. The biggest in the area," Albina replied in a matter-of fact tone and with an unnecessarily stern look on her face as she went to meet an elderly German who came in carrying a neat little box with red-and-gold labels. The newcomer turned out to be Kranz. He was obviously ill at ease. As soon as he had laid the box down on a chair next to the door he bowed awkwardly and turned away as if to emphasize that he was there in a purely menial capacity and had nothing to do with the whole business. As a matter of fact, he had advised against it, for he knew something of the commandant and was certain he would not be pleased.

And indeed Lubentsov flushed with anger when the meaning of all this dawned on him. His face twitched, but he controlled his temper, pulled out his notebook and began questioning Frau Lüttwitz. He inquired how many litres her distillery turned out daily, where she got the raw materials, at what prices she sold her output, how

many workers she employed and how long her supply of alcohol would last. Having written it all down, he advised her to keep up the production pace. The occupation authorities would help her. It was not excluded that they might contract to buy part of the distillery's output for the use of the army, in which case it would be enabled to obtain the raw materials needed. As for Lubentsov himself and his comrades, they were not judges of distillery products.

At these words Kranz hurriedly bowed and vanished with the case. Frau Lüttwitz was visibly frightened; her long eyelashes fluttered and her self-assurance and aplomb vanished, making her look years younger. She had expected to see Lubentsov in private, and for that reason had brought Kranz along to act as interpreter. She was sure the commandant would have acted quite differently had he been alone. Now she did not know how to get out of the unpleasant situation.

"I didn't know. That was the rule when the British were here," she said. "Will you forgive me...."

She was not telling the truth. The British had had no such rule. Frau Lüttwitz herself had started the practice, first under the Americans, then under the British. Now her womanly intuition told her that the wisest thing to do was to blame the previous occupants, for she knew that the Russians had ample reason to be suspicious of their allies. And indeed, Lubentsov fully believed Frau Lüttwitz, for after what he had seen and heard in Lauterburg he thought the British capable of practically anything.

"It's all right," he assured her as he saw her to the door. When she had gone he turned to the three officers and said, "Too bad we had to let a perfectly good crate of liquor slip through our fingers." He glanced slyly at Chegodayev who grinned.

"That, Comrades," Lubentsov went on, "was a close-up view of the capitalist encirclement." And, seemingly

apropos of nothing, he added, "Where are your families, by the way?" But the connection was clear to them all.

"I haven't got any," Menshov said. "Bachelor."

"My wife's in Moscow," replied Chegodayev. "No children."

"I've got a family of five back home in Kostroma," Kasatkin said, getting up to pace the room. "You did the right thing of course. It's best not to lose one's temper. But, frankly speaking, I would have told her what I thought of her. It's a disgusting thing to do—offering bribes. I really think she should have been told off."

"I would advise you to bring your families over," Lubentsov said. "I'm also trying to get my wife demobilized—she's in the army. They've promised to let her go."

Albina, who had been listening to them in silence, her hands resting on the back of a chair and an enigmatic smile on her lips, stopped smiling suddenly and said with a bluntness that shocked Lubentsov:

"Aren't you wasting too much time discussing your darling wives? There's a queue waiting to see you."

Lubentsov felt most awkward. Had he been alone with her, he would have simply laughed it off and said something about women never liking to hear men talk about their wives until they were married themselves. But to the newcomers her tone and manner could not but suggest that their relations were not purely official. A mere office employee could not have spoken like that. Lubentsov was angry, but he controlled himself.

"We'll have to find you a husband so you shouldn't be so hard on us married men," he joked lamely, glancing at Kasatkin from the corner of his eye.

He had arranged to go to Fichtenrode to see Major Pigarev about a regular supply of petrol for Lauterburg and the surrounding area, and he asked Kasatkin to take

over in the office. As he got up to go, Albina too picked up her hat.

"I won't be needing a translator in Fichtenrode," he said to her rather dryly. "You will remain here with Major Kasatkin."

Her eyes flashed, but she said nothing. For the first time in many days he got into the car without her.

16

As always when he was alone with Lubentsov, Ivan was talkative. He praised the German roads, asked Lubentsov whether he liked his work, to which Lubentsov, after a brief pause, replied that he did.

Ivan was silent for a few moments. Then he said:

"I want to go home."

"Perhaps you'd like a few weeks' leave to visit your people? Leaves are granted, now."

Ivan looked at Lubentsov incredulously.

"Why didn't you mention it to me before?" Lubentsov said.

"Didn't have much of a chance with that interpreter woman hanging about all the time. She doesn't seem to be wanting to go home. She likes it here—got used to it."

Fichtenrode came into sight in the distance, and soon they drove into the old German town. It had suffered less than Lauterburg from air raids and looked more attractive and lively. Not without envy Lubentsov noted that much more had been done to clear away the debris than in Lauterburg. He did not see any impassable streets.

"Good for Pigarev," he said.

The commandant's office occupied a big building, far bigger than the house on the square in Lauterburg, and everything about it seemed more impressive. Down below

stood a tall sentry with an automatic rifle with bayonet fixed. The bright silken flag flying over the entrance was four times the size of the flag in Lauterburg. At the entrance was a small office where Germans who came here on business had to get a pass before being allowed to enter the building.

Lubentsov went up to the ground floor and into a huge, carpeted hall with a grandfather clock at the far end which chimed the quarter hour and accentuated the solemn grandeur of the room by its staid, measured ticking. At the other end, near a black padded door, was a desk and behind it a sergeant with a red arm-band and thick-rimmed tortoise-shell glasses which helped to make the place even more impressive.

The sergeant, a lean young man with prominent Adam's apple and polished manners, very much the intellectual in appearance, leapt to his feet when Lubentsov entered.

"Please sit down," he said when Lubentsov stated his business. "The major, I am sure, would be glad to see you, but he happens to be out at present. Most likely he is at home."

The sergeant called up Major Pigarev's home. Lubentsov heard the booming voice at the other end: "Send him over at once!"

Pigarev lived in a large old villa. Here too there was a sentry with an automatic rifle, but without a bayonet. He saluted Lubentsov and flung open the grille-work gate at the archway leading into the courtyard. The archway ran through the full depth of the house. With its lining of hops and ivy it was like a green tunnel opening on the brightness of a small courtyard with flowerbeds and old lindens.

Pigarev, his tunic unbuttoned and bare feet thrust into slippers, met Lubentsov in the courtyard and after an effusive welcome ushered him into the house through

a small door whose dark-red paint stood out in sharp contrast to the green creepers covering the entire wall.

"Can't say you've done badly for yourself," Lubentsov said, slapping Pigarev on the back. It gave him genuine pleasure to look again at his comrade's rough-hewn but pleasant features, his upturned nose, small sly eyes, and his red hair parted in the middle.

"The American commandant used to live here before," Pigarev explained. "So I'm sort of keeping up the tradition. Best house in town, too. The Germans like their authorities to put up a proper front."

"So I've heard. What makes you all so sure that you know what the Germans like? I've noticed that what they like is to sit down to a square meal."

They went up to the sitting-room and settled down for a chat. To his surprise Lubentsov learned that the Fichtenrode commandant's office was already fully staffed.

"It's all very simple," Pigarev explained. "I've spent most of my time so far in Altstadt studying the instructions and insisting on getting the people I need. And they gave me a lot of fine fellows who know their jobs. I've an agronomist to take care of agriculture, and an engineer for industry. The propaganda department is in the hands of a former Party worker and a university lecturer to boot. You can't expect things to be handed down to you."

Lubentsov had to admit he was right. Finally he got to the matter of the petrol, but no sooner had he taken it up than the telephone rang. It was Menshov from Lauterburg calling Lubentsov.

"Your wife has arrived, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," he said.

Lubentsov laid down the receiver and turned a radiant face to Pigarev.

"Tanya has come!" he said.

Pigarev dressed hastily and they left for the office.

"I'll see you get your petrol," Pigarev assured Lubentsov on the way. "You just go back and don't worry. When you get round to celebrating the home-coming, don't forget to invite me. By the way, I hear you have a distillery in Lauterburg. How about swopping some liquor for petrol?" When they reached the office he shouted, "Orlov! Matyushin! Benevolensky!"

Two officers and the bespectacled sergeant emerged from the building. Pigarev introduced them.

"Got enough petrol with you? If you need some, we'll fill you up. Benevolensky, get some flowers for the lieutenant-colonel. Quick! Make it roses."

Lubentsov listened to his chatter as if it had no bearing on him. He himself was literally speechless with joy at the thought of the long-awaited re-union with his wife. He was glad that Pigarev had remembered the flowers—otherwise it would never have occurred to him. As for the party, Pigarev was right again. They would have a proper celebration.

On the way back he tried to picture what life together with Tanya would be like, but he just could not imagine it. The very idea that they would never have to part again seemed strange. They would have their meals together, and go for walks in the evening—that was as far as his imagination went.

A strong fragrance of roses filled the car. Ivan, with his usual tact, drove in silence this time, seeing Lubentsov smile to himself. Now and again he couldn't help wondering how a man as sensible and self-controlled as the lieutenant-colonel could get so soft and sentimental just because his wife had arrived. He, Ivan, loved his wife too, but he never allowed himself to show it.

Lubentsov climbed the stairs as if walking in his sleep. He knew he would come face to face with Tanya at any moment, yet the actual meeting took him by surprise. He felt as a person might who first sets eyes on something

that he knew only by hearsay—as a visitor to Leningrad, perhaps, who on seeing Peter the Great's statue for the first time is amazed most of all by the fact that it looks exactly as he had expected it to look.

"Our division is being sent home," Tanya said.

At first he did not understand, but then the meaning of the words sank in.

"What shall we do?" he said. There was dismay in his voice.

"I've got three days' leave. Let's try to make the most of them. That's all we can do."

The three days went by very quickly. Although the other officers tried to relieve Lubentsov of as much work as possible, he nevertheless had to spend several hours a day in the office. But whatever he was doing, his thoughts were of Tanya—now so near, separated from him only by a few walls. Even during important conferences with representatives of the anti-fascist parties, with town officials, and with bürgermeisters of nearby villages, he thought of her. Once or twice she came into his office, but since she was a Russian officer herself, nobody showed the slightest surprise. No one but Lubentsov himself, who could not get over the fact that she seemed to have grown older and more thoughtful, and that she was very lovely. She was clever too, he thought, and always said the right thing. Everybody liked her, and he was proud that she was his wife and that the time would come when this charming woman would be wholly his and that he, Seryozha Lubentsov—he still thought of himself as the lad from the taiga village—would be everything to her too.

The very thought that she was somewhere near, and that whenever he wished he could say, "Gentlemen (or Comrades), you must excuse me, but I have important business to attend to," and go to her, gave him a thrill of pleasure. But he never dropped his work, or left an

important conference, for this was not in his nature. Perhaps he derived the greatest pleasure from putting off the happiness of being with Tanya, knowing that it was there within reach, and could become reality at will.

At times the desire to be with her became unbearable, and he would get up from his chair and walk up and down the room to hide his emotion from the others. But, as the days went by, the bitter knowledge that she was going away gave him no rest.

In the evening of the third day they drove out into the hills. As the car climbed higher and higher, Lubentsov and Tanya sat side by side in silence, holding hands. At last Lubentsov told Ivan to pull up at the roadside. He helped Tanya out of the car. For a moment they looked at the red-tiled roofs of the town down below, then walked up the road until they came to the White Deer Inn with its little white tables and huge sun-shades in front. Nearby some children and a few elderly people were playing skittles.

"Want some beer?" Lubentsov asked.

"No, thanks."

They watched the players for a few minutes and returned to the car.

"Would you like to visit an underground factory?"

"I don't mind."

They turned off the highway and drove along a gravel road. On their right the hills reared up, with bare grey crags jutting out of the pine-woods covering their crests. It was warm, the yellow trunks of the pines seemed to be giving off the heat of the sun accumulated during the day. Peace and quiet reigned supreme, broken only by the twittering of birds.

Suddenly a massive gate hewn out in the rock appeared. This was the underground war factory. Lubentsov and Tanya walked past a sentry and stopped at the entrance to a huge cave. Inside, rows of machines

gleamed dully in the half-gloom. It was hard to believe that above these sinister premises were the soughing pines and singing birds they had been admiring only a few minutes before.

As testimony to the Herculean efforts Germany had exerted to win the war it was impressive. Yet the effect was negated and the senselessness of all the effort it represented brought home once more the realization that this factory deep down in the bowels of the earth had been created not by Germans—misguided, but nevertheless believing that they were working for the good of their country—but by foreign slaves who had lived in the prison camp nearby.

"We'll begin dismantling in a day or two," Lubentsov said.

They got back into the car and were soon on the asphalt road again. It wound up and up through thickets of rowan-trees, beech, hornbeam and alder, then plunged into the gloom of a dense fir forest. But the beauty of the scenery, the crystalline air, the singing of birds and the rush of mountain torrents failed to lift their spirits, and Lubentsov soon gave up his feeble attempts at being cheerful. Ivan too said nothing out of sympathy for his passengers.

They drove through a picturesque mountain village. The climb was now steeper than ever.

"Soon we'll reach the Brocken," Lubentsov said, "the very same Brocken of the witches' Sabbath in *Faust*—the scene of the Walpurgis Night. Heine's *Travel to Harz* is also about these parts."

At last they were on the bare summit of the Brocken, looking down at the wooded hills of the Harz that extended far into the distance. Here and there a village with its needle-like church spire added a bright touch to the landscape. The air was so pure that one could see for miles around. The setting sun cast a delicate purplish

glow over the sky and gilded the velvety folds of the hills.

Lubentsov watched Tanya from the corner of his eye. Her face was grave and sad. Realization that even here, with this scene of magic beauty spread out at her feet, she could not forget that they would soon have to part, filled his heart with happiness, pride and a gnawing sorrow. Yet he continued talking in a tone of false gaiety.

"Yes, this is where all the witches of Germany gather, the young and the old, on broom-sticks and without, for their famous Sabbath. See those stones—that's the witches' altar. And the stone hut was built to commemorate Goethe's visit here. Why the Americans wrecked it, I can't understand. Are you cold, darling?"

"No. The hut should be rebuilt, though."

"There speaks the commandant's wife! I've already thought of it. Darling, I love you so. I don't know how I shall live without you...."

She wept a little, and they set out on the return journey.

The next morning a car from the medical battalion came for her. Lubentsov wanted to go with her part of the way, but he had been called to a conference in Karlshorst.

When her car drove off, he stood for a long time on the pavement looking after it. The sun was just coming up, but he was not conscious of it or anything else apart from the fact that Tanya was gone, and only gradually did he become aware of the street with its wooden block paving, the stony features of Roland, the black gap in the left wing of the cathedral, and the long, early-morning shadows cast by passers-by on the far side of the square. The full realization now came upon him that ahead was a long ordeal of separation from the woman who had become as indispensable to him as the air he breathed. At that moment he hated this quiet German town; all its

problems seemed to him petty, unimportant, utterly immaterial. The entire landscape with the castle and the hills beyond, the flagstone pavements, the pointed tile roofs, the faces of the Germans passing by and even the faces of his colleagues struck him as repellent, alien and of no importance whatever to him, to his present and his future.

In Karlshorst he addressed a conference on denazification which was attended by Marshal Zhukov. But here too the same thoughts oppressed him. And he could not rid himself of them even when he was answering questions asked by the marshal and two generals.

The marshal and the generals, however, were highly pleased with his replies—probably because being engrossed in his own thoughts he dealt with the issues at hand without the slightest nervousness or self-consciousness. But for once Lubentsov did not care whether he impressed his chiefs favourably or not.

17

When Lubentsov returned to his office late that night, Voronin met him at the door with a broad grin on his face.

"What's up?" Lubentsov asked him.

"Albina's gone," replied Voronin. He seemed vastly pleased.

Lubentsov went into Kasatkin's office. All the officers were there.

"Just imagine," Kasatkin said. "In the middle of the day, during office hours, she declares she's leaving Lauterburg. Amazing irresponsibility. Where are the staff records? When was she taken on? What was her salary?" He nervously pulled at his cigarette. "She was very

impertinent to me. Besides, I'm not at all sure she was a reliable interpreter."

"Oh yes, she was," Menshov said. "I know enough German to tell. She was a good enough interpreter, got all shades of meaning too. But cracked, definitely cracked."

"Where is she now?" Lubentsov asked.

"Gone," said Voronin from the door. "Cleared out, as she said she would. Hired two German lorries and hit the road in an unknown direction."

"Outrageous," growled Kasatkin.

"As far as that goes she had every right to do what she did," Lubentsov said. "She was never formally put on the staff. As a matter of fact I haven't a record book for staff. I suppose we'll have to put everything on an official footing. But I can't see what could have happened. Her work was quite satisfactory. Punctual too. Did anything happen to upset her?"

"Upset her!" Kasatkin flared up. "This is not a nursery school, it's an office, and a military one at that!"

"She wasn't in the service," Chegodayev tried to placate him.

"We'll have to find another interpreter," Lubentsov said to Voronin. "Go over to the camp and see whether the peg-legged chap can recommend one."

Early the next morning, when the others were still asleep, Voronin woke up Ivan and they drove down to the former Russian camp. The place was all but deserted. Most of the inmates had gone to Lauterburg and other towns, the girls to work as waitresses in army canteens or shop assistants in army stores and the young men to join the army.

The crippled ex-lieutenant, however, was still there. Seeing him smoking in front of the barrack, Voronin stopped the car, jumped out and strode up the path with a jingling of medals. He was wearing all his decorations

—at that time everybody did so, not so much because they wished to exhibit them, but simply because they did not know what else to do. The ex-lieutenant, who was wearing an ordinary white Russian shirt, eyed the impressive array of medals—among them the Red Banner Order and two Orders of Glory—with interest. Voronin greeted him warmly and then with a slightly superior air told him what he wanted.

"Come in," said the one-legged man. He led the way down the long corridor to a door which opened into a tiny room papered with German newspapers and magazines. "Xenia, come here for a moment," he called into the corridor, standing aside to let Voronin enter.

"Will you have breakfast with me?" he asked.

"Strictly speaking, I've already had my breakfast."

"What's a couple of breakfasts to a soldier?"

Some food and a bottle of wine appeared on the table. About ten minutes later a girl entered the room. She was very thin and rather short in stature, and her grey eyes under thick black brows that all but met at the bridge of her nose looked sombre. Her black uncombed hair hung down nearly to her waist. Evidently she had just got up.

"How would you like to work as an interpreter for the commandant?" the cripple asked her. "They want an interpreter. Asked me to find someone for them. To take that bitch's place. She ran away."

"I don't mind," she said with an unfriendly look at Voronin.

"Come on then," said Voronin. He got up, shook hands with the peg-legged man. "Want a job?" he asked him. "Drop in at the office. Might be able to do something for you. The chief's taken a fancy to you."

The peg-legged man flushed. He did not reply.

A few minutes later Voronin and the girl went out.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"Luga, Leningrad Region."

"How did you get here?"

"Like everybody else."

"What did you do at home?"

"Went to school."

"And what did you do here?"

"Worked in the underground factory."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Married?"

"No."

"Want to get married?"

The girl did not smile. She walked on in silence.

"You're awful glum."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"You're right there. Did you finish school?"

"Yes. All ten classes."

"That's quite a lot. Parents?"

"My father's in the army. I don't know whether he's alive or dead. Mother keeps house."

"Ever been abroad?" Voronin asked, then roared with laughter at his own witticism. "Never mind. How much German do you know? Can you speak it, read and write?"

"Yes."

"We can consider the questionnaire filled."

The girl gave a short, dry laugh.

"But you haven't even asked my name."

"Neither I have," said Voronin with a sheepish grin.

"Xenia Andreyevna Spiridonova."

"Dmitry Yegorovich Voronin, born nineteen sixteen, bachelor, at your service." He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye and added, "Might as well warn you that I've a girl waiting for me back in Shuya, Ivanovo Region."

After a brief interview with Kasatkin, Xenia was formally hired and her name was entered on the first

page of the first ledger of the Lauterburg commandant's office.

A few days later Lubentsov received a reminder of Albina.

A car pulled up in front of the office and in walked two rather well-dressed gentlemen carrying a large bundle which they handled so carefully that one might have thought it contained glass. The visitors turned out to be from Müller and Mauritius, Tailors, and their mission was to deliver a suit of clothes the firm had made for the commandant. Voronin took them in to Lubentsov.

"What suit? Who ordered a suit?" Lubentsov was nonplussed.

"For you, sir. Your interpreter ordered it," the older of the two explained. "She asked us to dispense with the usual fittings, since you were exceedingly busy. Herr Mauritius personally estimated the size. Where shall we leave it?"

What a woman! Voronin said to himself.

"How much does it cost?" asked Lubentsov. He was looking worried.

The tailors exchanged glances.

"No price was mentioned," the elder said, embarrassed. "I presume no payment is expected."

"What do you mean—who makes suits for nothing? You'd better call up at once and find out."

The man phoned Mauritius, told him what the trouble was, and listened for some time, fidgeting nervously. At last he put down the receiver and told Lubentsov the price. Lubentsov paid the money and the men left.

"What a woman!" Voronin said, aloud this time.

After a while he added that at least Albina had been right in suggesting that the commandant should find an apartment for himself instead of sleeping in the office. It turned out that Voronin already had an eye on several houses he thought might be suitable.

"I thought Tatyana Vladimirovna would be staying here, so I looked round for some decent place to live in."

"I don't need anything now," Lubentsov said.

"But she'll be coming back, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel, mark my words," Voronin persisted. "They're not going to keep women in the army much longer. I'm sure Tatyana Vladimirovna will be coming soon. So was Albina. That's why she ran away."

Lubentsov looked at him in surprise. He was about to flare up, but changed his mind. Instead he agreed to go with Voronin to look at the house he had chosen.

The two houses they looked over were indeed luxurious. Both had belonged to some of the wealthiest people in town and were in no way inferior to Pigarev's place in Fichtenrode. They were big houses with high ceilings, large fire-places, and iron-grille fences round the front gardens. Lubentsov turned them both down. He said he wanted a small house. The plainer the better. Voronin did not argue, but neither did he give up the search.

The next morning, as he set out on another house-hunting expedition, he saw Kranz standing in the street near the office. The old man looked hungry and miserable. After a glance at the first-floor windows to make sure Lubentsov was not watching, Voronin called Kranz over and took him into his room. Without a word he sliced some bread and bacon, put it before the old man, and then boiled up a pot of tea. The two sat down for a snack.

"Your Russian's pretty good," Voronin said. "Where did you learn it?"

"I lived in St. Petersburg.... I beg your pardon, Leningrad, before the war."

"What war?"

"The First World War."

"Oh, I see."

"I was in business as a watchmaker—everybody knew me in the Vasilyevsky Ostrov district."

"I see."

When they had eaten, Voronin said, "Come along with me. We've got to find a place for the commandant to live in. He wants something simple Can you help me?"

Kranz thought it over and agreed. He took Voronin to a narrow, medieval street with small houses huddling close together.

The house Kranz thought would suit the commandant stood on the grounds of a bigger two-storey house belonging to a professor. The grounds with their old lindens and a conservatory at one end looked very pleasant. Somebody in the big house was playing the piano.

"That's Fräulein Erika, the professor's daughter," explained Kranz.

They were met by a neat bespectacled old lady wearing a white apron and a little white cap pinned on her grey hair. When Kranz explained to her what they wanted, she was horrified, not because she objected to the commandant living in the small house, but because she was afraid he would not like it and that the professor's family might have to move there to make room for him in the big house. Her first reaction was that it was the big house that was wanted. Kranz, however, reassured her and she went to ask the professor.

Voronin took it for granted that the professor was a medical man and was pleased that when Tatyana Vladimirovna came she would have a colleague to associate with. It might even prove useful to her. Besides, the grounds were nice and sunny, and as for the house, Voronin couldn't imagine anything better. It had three rooms and a kitchen, all adequately furnished, and a glassed-in verandah with bird-cages and potted flowers on the window-sills.

The old lady returned and promised to find some more furniture and rugs to make the place as comfortable as possible. Voronin, however, said nothing more was

needed, for he knew his chief's tastes and, moreover, fully agreed with him.

"Don't trouble yourself, Mother," he said. "We proletarians don't need any of that stuff. We want the whole world or nothing."

"Mother" was not at all shocked; she was quite ready to let him have the whole world as long as the professor's things weren't touched. And so all the arrangements were made and Lubentsov moved to his new quarters.

THE TALE OF THE SIX SOLDIERS

"What are we going to do now?" asked Koroteyev, lifting himself up on his elbow.

To the others too it seemed that at any moment now the entire army all along the front from the Baltic to the Black Sea would begin pouring back, on its way home. Hence to keep going West seemed to be pointless. Veretennikov was inclined to agree, but being in charge, he had to be more wary of hasty decisions.

"It's not for us to decide," he said. "Our job is to join the division. They'll tell us what to do."

Slowly the men rose. Veretennikov looked at the lorries. The near ones were loaded with shells, neatly packed in long crates. The far ones carried Katyushas—brand-new, their green paint gleaming, as handsome a sight as any soldier might wish. Veretennikov looked at them and wondered. Where were they being taken? And why? What only fifteen minutes earlier had seemed the most important and precious thing in the world, was now utterly worthless.

The enormous Damoclean sword that had hung over the country and its people, from the youngest to the oldest, as persistently as the sky, now dissolved into nothingness in a twinkling of the eye.

Nevertheless, when Veretennikov ordered his men to climb into one of the lorries to continue on their way

westward they obeyed him, but even as they did so, they no longer were the same men they had been. They belonged to a new era and were keenly conscious of the fact.

The lorries roared down the road. Then night fell, the first night of peace for so many years, and the sky was studded with stars. The column drove into a huge demolished city, which stared at them through the empty sockets of shattered windows, though its ruins were already decked with festive flags. It was martyred Warsaw, but the men did not know it.

Warsaw was left behind, and the lorries roared on one after the other, their headlights cutting deep into the night after so many years of blackout. Veretennikov wondered how long it was since he had last seen these fans of light rushing headlong through the darkness.

At Poznan the convoy turned off the main road, and the detail of six men jumped down at the western outskirts of the city. Soon another pink daybreak came. The ancients wrote of pink-fingered Eos extending her hands from east to west, and indeed the banners of dawn were like great hands outstretched tenderly to caress the dome of the sky.

There was no traffic at this early hour, for the drivers were still asleep, some in the homes of hospitable Poles, others in the cabs of lorries standing in roadside groves, or rolled up in their greatcoats on the ground between the wheels. The six looked round for a while, but decided to continue on foot. Before long a village with a handsome double-spired church came into sight; it was a pleasant scene to gaze upon in that early-morning light.

When they came closer to the place, however, they saw the hideous scars of war; most of the houses had been blown up and half of the church had been gutted by fire. Moreover, the village was deserted. Only one of the houses standing apart from the rest showed signs of life. Here

the soldiers found an old man and woman, who looked very much alike, and two boys of about twelve repairing what was left of their home. And that was not very much. Only the red-brick fire-place and chimney remained intact; some of the rafters had survived too, and so had a bit of the green slate roof, and the front porch, which still had its steps but was lacking a door.

The soldiers stopped to look at this pitiful yet inspiring sight. The old man and woman worked slowly, as if trying to economize on every movement. With stiff wrinkled hands they picked up a board and with the help of the boys added it to those they had already nailed between the window and the porch. The old man now and again dropped on his knees and, picking a nail from a box, drove it in with slow, feeble blows. This he did sitting down, evidently to save his strength. And when the board was nailed down, he would cough, get up from his bench and walk over to a pile of lumber some ten metres away. Some of the boards were new, others were grey with age, with rusty spots where the nails had been. Standing over the pile the old man and woman stopped to confer for a moment, and their voices were so low it seemed they lacked the strength for louder conversation.

"At that rate it will take them ten years to finish the house," said Koroteyev. He rolled a cigarette, but put it in his pocket unlit. Then he went to a crude carpenter's bench standing nearby and seizing the plane, ran it over a board with a delicacy of touch surprising in this uncouth soldier. Laying the plane down, he picked up a saw leaning against the bench, held it in his hand teeth upwards and gave it a twist that made it ring. Finally he raised it to the level of his eyes, squinted down the length of it, put it down, and returned to the others with a smile playing on his lips.

"I'm a carpenter too," said Zuyev.

In the meantime the old man and woman picked up a

plank and carried it to the bench. The man produced a metal ruler from his pocket and laid it against the plank while one of the boys pencilled a line along its edge. Then he took the saw and put it down on the pencil mark, the old woman seized the other grip, and the two began sawing at an incredibly slow pace.

The soldiers looked questioningly at Veretennikov, but the sergeant was staring at the road where a column of lorries had just appeared. The lorries drew parallel, but Veretennikov made no attempt to hail them. When they had gone by, he said:

"All right, here goes."

He took off his greatcoat. Fifteen seconds later there was a small heap of greatcoats, kits and pup-tents on the ground; in another fifteen seconds Koroteyev had seized the saw and the astounded old couple were sitting on the bench by the dead bonfire watching a new legend of the joy of peaceful labour and the friendship of peoples come into being.

The work hummed. Every now and then the soldiers burst into song only to break off abruptly to exchange some comment. The old man tried to help, to carry a piece of lumber, to hand tools to the soldiers, or to clear away the mounting heaps of shavings, but he was pushed back with little ceremony to his seat beside the old woman.

The woman's lips framed the name of the Virgin Mary, and she fetched milk for the soldiers and tried to make Koroteyev understand that she did not know how they could ever repay them for their help. But he did not understand Polish and kept shooing her away.

"Now don't interfere, Granny," he would say.

The boys, who turned out to be the old folks' grand-children, explained that their parents were in a prison camp and that they did not know whether they were still alive.

"Of course they're alive," Zuyev shouted from the roof,

removing a handful of nails from his mouth to make himself understood.

Other little boys from the village climbed the willows next to the house and perched among the branches to watch the soldiers at work.

Four days passed before Veretennikov began to get worried. Traffic on the road seemed to be thinning out, and he was afraid they might find themselves stranded in Poland. Then there was that receipt for the hay still lying in his pocket; after all, it was his duty to turn it in to his unit.

And so, when late that evening a long succession of headlights appeared far away on the road, he ordered his men to dress at once, pick up their rifles and take to the road. By this time the house was practically finished. The men hastily said good-bye to the elder of the boys—the old folks and the younger boy were already asleep—thrust a bag of sugar into his hands, and ran to the road.

The first car turned out to be an ambulance. The soldiers settled down on its soft leather-covered seats and rode in comfort to Berlin.

18

Captain Chokhov's company consisted mainly of young soldiers, many of whom had not fought in the war. It was quartered in barracks once occupied by a Prussian guards regiment in the old park not far from Friedrichshof.

Chokhov's mood at this time might have been described as one of restrained happiness. He spent all his days with his men and often stayed overnight at the barracks, not only because it was too much trouble to go home to the hostel, but because the company occupied his thoughts all the twenty-four hours of the day. Not

that he did not trust his platoon commanders—on the contrary, all three lieutenants were experienced officers who performed their duties irreproachably. Sergeant-major Sakunenko too—a former worker from Mariupol—was, like most Ukrainian N.C.O.s, a perfect soldier. Yet Chokhov lived in constant fear that something might happen to disgrace the company, and all his somewhat juvenile zeal was concentrated on warding off the countless temptations which he felt were lying in wait of the soldier at every turn.

Chokhov's *bête noire* was wine and women. He feared these two evils more than anything on earth, not for himself—for he had no doubts as to his own ability to resist temptation—but for his men.

He was worried by the bold stares of the German women who appeared at the windows whenever the company came out for drill, looking at the soldiers no longer with fear but with a frank and purely feminine interest.

This interest on the part of the German women showed that the enmity that once seemed everlasting was quickly wearing off and giving way to natural, human relationships. Chokhov, however, did not find this reassuring; on the contrary, it added to his worries. He began to hate the German women more than ever, for he did not trust them. Moreover—and here the danger was real—prostitution was very widespread in post-war Germany. Every evening young women, whose appearance left no doubt as to their profession, promenaded in the vicinity of the barracks. The vile, besotted face of war-wrecked bourgeois Europe was showing itself. Chokhov had heard that in Potsdam as elsewhere in Germany there existed legally operated brothels, a fact that shocked him profoundly for he had thought the civilized peoples had done away with this sort of thing long ago.

But it was not only fear of his men getting into a scrape that made Chokhov spend most of his time in the

barracks. He liked the barracks. His vague apprehensions that peace-time military service would be dull and monotonous proved unfounded. It was very different from service in war-time, but no less fascinating nevertheless. Chokhov liked the strict order of barrack life, the change of the guard to the strains of a real military band, the bugle calls, the immobile guard at the regimental colours, the exercises on the map and at the shooting range which all the officers took very seriously indeed. He himself conducted classes with the men on infantry weapons and the various service regulations. To instruct others he had to go through the regulations once more himself, and he found in their terse, concise language much that was in harmony with his own character. He knew that one could not always act according to prescribed rules—the war had taught him that—but for all that it was something to strive for, an ideal, and like all ideals it had something poetic about it, at least for him.

This attitude of his was shared by his men. True, they liked him best when he sat with them of an evening telling them in his quiet, matter-of-fact way about the fighting he had seen on the Karelian Isthmus and on the First Byelorussian Front, about the smashing of enemy fortifications, raids deep into the enemy's rear, and adventures he and his comrades had had. He told them about the scouts and about a Major Lubentsov, who had served in the same division with him, and described the fighting for the town in which they were now stationed, or, as he put it, where they were now "standing on guard of the interests of the Soviet Union." He repeated these words frequently, for he wanted his men to regard their garrison duty in a strange land as an important combat assignment and not so pointless an occupation as it might have seemed at first glance.

As time went on, Chokhov was to be seen less and less often at the hostel.

On one of the rare occasions when he went to the hostel to spend the night, he had no sooner opened the door than he knew, though the room was in darkness, that there was someone inside. Reaching for the switch, he snapped on the lights. Vorobeitsev, fully dressed and booted, was fast asleep on his bed. Beside him on the floor stood a pile of suitcases. As Chokhov climbed over them to get to his own bed, Vorobeitsev woke up, looked about in a daze and sat up.

"Didn't recognize you with that sunburn," he said, after a mumbled greeting. "You *are* black. Where've you been? Tactical exercises? Back in the line, eh?"

"That's right," said Chokhov. Looking at the suitcases and then at Vorobeitsev, he added, "Got kicked out, or what?"

"If you want to put it that way, yes," Vorobeitsev replied irritably. "I was politely asked to move—by two colonels with a detail of soldiers. And not only I—the whole block was evicted in an hour. Orders from above, you know. The brass upstairs has evidently taken a fancy to our digs."

His tone was casual, but it was clear that he was troubled about what had happened, perhaps even frightened. The eviction had probably not been quite as gentle an operation as he made it appear now. Evidently he had been given a serious reprimand.

"You should have asked for your furniture," Chokhov said. "The piano, for instance."

"Yes, just watch them giving it to me," Vorobeitsev grunted.

Something was weighing on his mind. All night long he tossed about on his bed and got up several times for a drink of water. In the morning he trailed after Chokhov to the barracks. He was unusually quiet all the way. Chokhov got him a meal ticket for the officers' canteen, but Vorobeitsev had no appetite for breakfast—probably

the meal was too simple for his present tastes. After breakfast he waited for Chokhov at the gates, and together they followed the company out of town for the day's training.

It was a fine July day, warm, but not too hot. The landscape with its venerable oaks and lime-trees spreading out their dense crowns, and tall beeches, slender in spite of their great age, was like something out of a picture-book. The sunlight filtering through the tree crowns flecked the white road and the green helmets of the men with quivering spots of light. The soldiers marched in three solid squares, by platoons, singing a song that had been written before the war. The words did not fit the times, but the music was melodious and easy to march to. A lean, bantam-sized soldier with an unexpectedly high-pitched and powerful voice led the singing, and the rest joined in the chorus in harmony, and this two-part singing imparted a melancholy ring to the tune.

The day's programme called for firing practice. The soldiers carried with them dark plywood shapes representing the enemy, and ordinary paper targets pasted on boards. For the officers it meant serious work, and the soldiers liked it. It was the real thing, and it required skill, and at the same time those who were through or waiting their turn had an opportunity to relax on the grass, to day-dream and watch the motionless clouds high up in the sky while pretending to be going through the handbook on marksmanship.

Chokhov, however, was not one of those commanders who let their men relax. While the targets were being set up and the sergeant-major was issuing the ammunition, and while the men assigned to keep trespassers from straying on to the range took up their positions, he ordered the sergeants to drill their sections. And so the men marched up and down the green expanse of grass,

marched and halted, marched and quick-marched, stepped out of the ranks to report to the sergeant and stepped back again. Commands were rapped out here and there, and occasionally the tramping of feet in unison sent a tremor through the ground. To the observer from the distance the spectacle would have seemed fascinating enough, if perhaps pointless.

Chokhov was constantly on the go, striding from group to group at his unhurried, measured gait. Vorobeitsev trailed after him, smoking one cigarette after another. Although all these exercises interested him very little, he could not but admire the company commander. Chokhov was now truly in his element. Coming up to a section going through its paces, he would stop to watch, and if he noticed something not quite right he would not shout at the men or the sergeant, but would show how it should be done. All his own movements were perfect—his was the perfection of the ballerina on the stage. And through it all his face remained grave and imperturbable and stern, and the joy he derived from his feeling of mastery over his every muscle was expressed only in his movements, which reflected the self-confidence and restraint of his entire character. Vorobeitsev was keenly aware of this.

Soon exhausted by the incessant walking, Vorobeitsev threw himself down under a tree, where he continued smoking cigarette after cigarette. During the rest break Chokhov and the three platoon commanders joined him. In the distance the targets, some dark, others lighter, projected over the parapets of trenches. The nearer targets were for the riflemen, the more distant ones, barely visible at eight hundred metres, for the machine-gunners.

The soldiers lined up, and the sergeant-major counted three rounds for each. Chokhov smiled at the thought that a little more than two months ago there had been no counting of the ammunition issued—you could take as

much as you wanted, and you could keep on firing all day long, indeed all week, if you wanted to. And looking at the men wearing their steel helmets in these peaceful surroundings, he remembered that during the war when real danger threatened them he and his men had gone without helmets most of the time.

Section by section the platoons stepped up to the firing line. The signallers waved their flags, and the bugle echoed over the fields and woods. The first volleys had rung out, quickening Chokhov's pulse, when an officer separated from a group that had appeared some half a kilometre to the left and came running towards him across the field.

"Cease fire!" the officer shouted as he came up.

"Cease fire," repeated Chokhov. For a moment he thought there had been an accident.

The soldiers looked at each other and got up slowly, leaving their rifles lying on the grass.

The officer turned out to be the battalion commander.

"There won't by any practice today," he said, panting. "You're to return to barracks and wait for further orders."

Chokhov ordered the targets to be collected and the company to fall in. He was excited and alarmed, but he asked no questions. His war-fevered imagination conjured up visions of emergencies that might have arisen. Perhaps Hitler, whose fate was still unknown at the time, had cropped up somewhere and had rallied the Germans round him. He was too preoccupied with his anxious thoughts to notice that Vorobeitsev had disappeared.

By evening the word went round that Stalin and Molotov had arrived in Berlin, and were probably in Potsdam at that moment. Why they had come, nobody knew. Everybody went about in a fever of excited anticipation.

The number of motor-cars and armoured carriers in the streets of Potsdam increased suddenly. A great many generals and colonels appeared. Even the sky overhead

sprang to life and the roar of aircraft engines was almost incessant.

The following day officers coming from Berlin said that Prime Minister Churchill and President Truman had arrived. Rumour had it that Churchill had been met by a band of the Guards wearing leopard skins. All in all it began to look like a three-power conference.

Later that night the orderly told Chokhov that he was wanted at the barracks gates. He found Vorobeitsev, very drunk but looking pleased with himself, waiting for him at the sentry post.

"Want to know why they kicked me out?" Vorobeitsev whispered loudly into Chokhov's ear. "You'll never guess who's going to stay in my house. Truman! The President of the United States! Think of that!"

19

The houses the American delegates occupied were guarded by tall young men with huge holsters strapped under their arm-pits. When they went off duty some of them got into their jeeps and drove to Berlin to do a thriving black-market business in Chesterfields and Camels, chocolate bars and canned goods. On seeing Soviet servicemen they would stop and roll up their sleeves to display armfuls of wrist watches—some had as many as fifteen on each arm. They readily accepted occupation marks, which they could change later into dollars.

Despite their respect, not unmingled with sentimentality, for the fighting men of an allied army that had helped to win the war, most Soviet people were unpleasantly surprised to see the Berlin markets full of Americans hawking their goods like so many pedlars.

But there were some who liked the free and easy manner of the Yanks, their lack of decorum, their obvious

disdain for military discipline, the familiarity with which they treated each other, superior officers included.

The Americans' unashamed striving for wealth impressed those Soviet people for whom capitalist private property still had a secret fascination. For there were such—and not so few as it has become customary to believe. Living in a country where capitalist property had been abolished and was disdained by the majority, they learned to conceal their instincts, but this did not make them less greedy. And so, doing lip-service to what was the accepted thing, deep down they longed for the return of the old. Like all philistines in the world, they could not accept the present simply because it was the present, and they admired the past because it had gone by.

The authors of the *Communist Manifesto* said that the property question is the leading question in determining party policies. This is true today as well. Indeed, the dividing line between ideologies is formed by the difference in attitudes to property and not the frontiers between states. One might say that a miserly, greedy, selfish individual cannot be a Socialist, however much he may profess to be. Mercenary self-interest in the life of the individual is very much akin to capitalism in the life of society. Where the unmercenary person will strive to enrich his store of knowledge, the mercenary-minded will seek to accumulate wealth.

Captain Vorobeitsev liked the Americans he saw. They were out to make money, and did not conceal it. At home, in his own family circle, Vorobeitsev had mixed with people who also wanted to line their pockets, but never admitted it. And the same applied to him. He liked jazz, but in public he said he preferred Chaikovsky. He liked to gamble at cards, but publicly he was a chess fan. He trusted nobody, for he knew that he himself was not trustworthy.

There was nothing unnatural in this. A progressive idea, even if it has been taken up by a great state, cannot overcome every survival of the old so quickly, for the reactionary elements adapt themselves to circumstances and learn to play the hypocrite; publicly they share the views of the majority and secretly reject them or remain indifferent. But it is not enough just to establish this fact. We must admit that much of the blame rests on ourselves, for hypocrisy of this kind is bred by overemphasis on coercion and underestimation of education. To educate means to tell people the truth about their own life and life elsewhere in the world. This is what Lenin taught us, and what the Party is teaching us. This is something everybody who has anything to do with education should remember.

But to return to our narrative.

Captain Vorobeitsev spent much of his time in Babelsberg, loitering in the vicinity of his old flat which had been taken over not by President Truman, but by Vice-Admiral Emory S. Land, one of the members of the American delegation.

Vorobeitsev hung about buying watches, electric razors, cigarettes, chewing gum and sulpha drugs from the Americans. He made the acquaintance of two of the soldiers detailed for guard duty—Petrenko and Kaplan, both of whose families had emigrated to America at some time or other. They were as American as the rest of the G.I.s, but for all that they had inherited a sentimental attachment to their parents' mother country. Petrenko would talk about Poltava and Kaplan about Odessa practically with tears in their eyes, although neither had ever been there. Besides, they spoke Russian. They would slap Vorobeitsev on the back and assure him that when the conference ended he would get his old digs back, and promised to do their best to see that nothing was touched in the place. They were loud in their

praises of the heroism of the Red Army and bitter about the damage done by the Germans in Poltava and Odessa.

Through them Vorobeitsev came to know Lieutenant White of the U.S. Army. White also spoke Russian. He was a tall, lean young man, mostly bursting with high spirits, but prone to spells of melancholy bordering on idiocy. In these moments of depression he would sit motionless, staring into space with his wide-open blue eyes, his thin lips muttering some incoherent words—a prayer perhaps. He was contemptuous of the Germans. The British he invariably called "those fools," and the French were "trash." He respected only the Russians, and he said so not only for Vorobeitsev's benefit. He meant it. Only the Americans and Russians were worth anything, he would say, and the Russians were the only people he would not care to fight.

Vorobeitsev wanted to introduce White to Chokhov, for whom he felt a peculiar attachment which he himself could not quite explain. Strangely enough, he wanted to be like the Americans, and like Chokhov too, though he understood perfectly well that the two extremes could never be reconciled. Perhaps it was because of some vague desire to solve this problem that he wanted to bring Chokhov and the Americans together.

He called up Chokhov and when they met he told him about his new friends. Vorobeitsev did not conceal his admiration for the free and easy manner in which they behaved among themselves and with others, and waxed ecstatic over their high standard of living. He liked them and the things with which they surrounded themselves, and the quality and workmanship of these things. All this he said without any ulterior political motives. Chokhov on his part regarded the Americans with the natural sympathy one feels towards an ally, and although he would have much preferred to stay at the

barracks, he agreed to go with Vorobeitsev to pay them a visit.

First they went to what the American officers called their "camp." Here they were met by White. After a couple of highballs they went to another house where Petrenko and Kaplan were waiting for them. At first Chokhov was surprised to hear the three Americans speak Russian, although with a sprinkling of English words that occasionally made it impossible to understand them.

Chokhov drank little and spoke little, and felt quite at home until the Americans began boasting about their acquisitions and the money they had made during the war. This repelled him. The hosts did a few outlandish dance steps, singing a song that was all rhythm and no melody; Vorobeitsev too appeared to know it, for he joined in the chorus. Then they played records. Some were vocal recordings; the voice of the singer made Chokhov visualize her as someone stricken by the St. Vitus' dance.

Kaplan went out and returned presently, bringing three girls with him. He went over to Chokhov and, rumpling his hair, told him not to worry if there weren't enough to go round. Chokhov, as the guest and a Russian officer, had first choice.

Chokhov was dumbfounded. He looked at the girls. One of them was no more than sixteen, with hair curled up high in front and a coloured woollen kerchief at the back of her head. She was trembling with cold and fear, although she tried hard to look gay and pert. Most of all it was her sharp red nose that made Chokhov feel sorry for her.

Chokhov did not think of his little sister, like so many heroes of novels—in fact, he had no sister. Nor did he think of anything else in particular at the moment. All he knew was that he was sorry for the pitiful slip of a

girl who was trying so hard to look grown-up. The whole thing revolted him.

"You'd better go home," he said, going up to her. "Straight away, quick." She knew he meant it, and she also caught the note of sympathy and compassion in his hard voice. He pushed her towards the door, hoping the others would not see, not because he was ashamed of himself, but because he was ashamed for the others.

White, who had been watching them, came over and joined Chokhov in hustling the girl out of the room. "Get out of here. *Schnell nach Haus. Idi k chortu,*"* he said in three languages at once.

When the door closed behind her, he walked past Chokhov and slumped down in his chair.

"She's broke," he said after a while. "She'll probably starve to death."

Chokhov got up, wandered about for a while, and then picked up his cap and slipped out.

Later Vorobeitsev searched for him everywhere in the house and its vicinity. The Americans too were very much put out, for they had taken a liking to Chokhov and couldn't understand why he had run out of the party when it was just getting into full swing.

As for Vorobeitsev, he understood. Later he even reproached Chokhov for leaving him behind.

20

One evening White invited Vorobeitsev for a drive in the environs of Berlin. They drove across the whole city and out into the suburb of Hapenfeld, where White stopped the jeep in front of a small house on the edge of a lake. Inside were several Americans whom Voro-

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* Go home quick. Go to the devil.—*Tr.*

beitsev had not met before. They had an ample supply of liquor and before long the captain was very much under the weather. Towards dawn the Americans disappeared, only to return some time later with a sack full of jewellery. The Americans were annoyed with Vorobeitsev for he had refused to join the raid they had made on a German jeweller who had hidden his stock, but they nevertheless decided to let him have a dozen gold rings and a bracelet.

Vorobeitsev, who had sobered up by now, watched the division of the spoils with fear and trepidation. This was a clear case of looting in which he, a captain of the Red Army, could not afford to be mixed up. He tried remonstrating, but the Americans did not seem to understand him. White laughed and added another five rings to Vorobeitsev's share. In the meantime it had grown light outside, and the party climbed into the jeep and drove back to Potsdam at breakneck speed.

The conference ended on August 2. The next morning Vorobeitsev went to Babelsberg and found the streets deserted. No more sentries or patrols were to be seen. The doors and windows of the houses were wide open. The house which Vorobeitsev considered his was empty too—cleaned out completely. Even the piano had been taken. The floor was littered with apple cores, cigarette butts, empty cigarette packets and tins, and orange peel. And in the midst of it all sat a huge boxer with great sagging jowls, evidently forgotten or deliberately abandoned by its masters. But what infuriated Vorobeitsev most was that even his rickety old Steyr was gone.

"Get out of here," Vorobeitsev said to the dog. He did not like dogs in general, and this particular specimen looked like an unusually ferocious beast.

The dog ran out of the house only to return at once. It sat down in a corner and turned a pair of huge eyes on Vorobeitsev. He could not stand the place any longer

and set out for the hostel. The dog trailed behind him. Before long he noticed that the animal inspired both fear and respect in the people they met in the street. Two majors Vorobeitsev knew stopped to ask whose it was.

"Mine," said Vorobeitsev without hesitation, although he had just been wondering how to get rid of the dog. Now he began to feel that part of the respect the dog inspired in people accrued to its master too.

"Let's go, pal," he said to the dog in a gentler tone.

The dog wagged its stump of a tail in response and followed Vorobeitsev into the hostel. The captain dug into a suitcase for a lump of sugar and threw it on the floor. The dog ate it. The second lump he gingerly held out in his hand; the dog took it neatly, without even touching his fingers. Vorobeitsev heaved a sigh of relief.

"So we're friends now, eh? Only you've got to obey me, get it?"

The dog detected a threatening note in his voice, and its head drooped and tail stopped wagging.

"Good boy! You are a boy, I suppose, yes, you are. Now what's your name?"

The tail was wagging vigorously again.

"I see you understand Russian. You're all right. We'll get along."

Leaving the dog in the room, he left to look up Chokhov.

On the way he was stopped by a patrol. The officer in charge, a young major of athletic build, called out to him from the distance:

"Comrade Captain, may I see you for a minute!"

The shout brought Vorobeitsev down to earth with a jolt. His thoughts had been somewhere far away; as a matter of fact, latterly he had practically forgotten that he was still in the army.

"You evidently haven't looked at yourself in the mirror for quite some time, Captain," said the major, shaking his head reproachfully. "I will have to ask you to accompany us. We have a mirror for you in the guardhouse."

Vorobeitsev stared at him with bloodshot, uncomprehending eyes, then cast a panicky glance at his tunic, breeches and boots. His tunic collar was unbuttoned, and his belt buckle had slipped to one side.

There was a mirror in the guardhouse and in it Vorobeitsev saw his bloated, sagging face and uncombed hair for the first time in days. He shuddered.

The penalty had to be paid at once. The offenders were lined up in the courtyard, officers and privates separately. A rosy-cheeked, white-skinned young junior lieutenant, the very personification of military efficiency and so smartly uniformed that he might have posed for the cover of an army magazine, appeared and put the officers through their paces. The work-out lasted for four hours, with two fifteen-minute breaks for rest. They marched and quick-marched, doubled, threw themselves down on the ground, and doubled again.

During the first hour some of the squad, and Vorobeitsev in particular, had bitter remarks to make about the lieutenant. They ran half-heartedly and dropped down and got up slowly. Though it must be admitted that Vorobeitsev was less annoyed with the lieutenant than with the obese major in front of him who had also been picked up by a patrol for some breach of discipline and was now doing his best to curry favour with the lieutenant; he was hard of hearing and would often ask Vorobeitsev to repeat the order for him.

After the first hour a colonel appeared in the courtyard. He sat down at a table in the middle of the yard and calmly watched the proceedings. There was no arguing or joking now. The colonel's eyes often stopped

on Vorobeitsev, and this induced him to make an effort to do his best. He fell down and jumped up as if bullets were singing around him. Sweat poured down his face, and his knees buckled under him. His riotous night life was taking its toll. The third hour on the drill-ground was easier, however, for a person adapts himself to everything. Even the fat major seemed to have lost weight and was breathing easier.

When it was all over, the officers queued up at the table to get their identification papers back. As he handed them out, the colonel had a few words to say to each of the offenders.

"I hope," he said to Vorobeitsev, "that this lesson will do you good. You must realize that your appearance and conduct in a foreign city have disgraced the Soviet uniform. Moreover, I intend to impress it on the Personnel Section of the Soviet Occupation Forces that they must pay more attention to educational work among the reserve officers. For there have been other offenders like you. Understand?"

"Yes," Vorobeitsev said, and, taking his papers, turned to go. But the colonel called him back.

"Is that how you address a superior officer?" he snapped. "Let me have your papers. Now take them again."

"Am I at liberty, Comrade Colonel?" Vorobeitsev said.

The colonel dismissed him.

Vorobeitsev saluted smartly, turned on his heels, and marched off, managing however to express his protest by kicking up his long legs higher than was necessary. He was afraid he might be called back again, but everything passed off smoothly.

When Vorobeitsev emerged in the street, it was growing dark. He felt tired, but fearing an encounter with another patrol he walked smartly. When he reached Chokhov's barracks after ten, he found the place in a

state of unusual animation. Men dashed about, and their voices were louder than usual. Nobody challenged him at the sentry post and he walked freely into the paved courtyard and across it to the single-storey brick barracks occupied by Chokhov's company. In the backroom, where the officers usually met, he found Chokhov and Sergeant-Major Sakunenko bending over a huge printed form laid out on the table.

Chokhov nodded to Vorobeitsev, who sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Our outfit's been disbanded," Chokhov said. His voice was calm, but Vorobeitsev understood what this meant to him.

Chokhov wanted to be alone, and on the pretext that he had some urgent business to attend to, left the room. To him the orders that had come through were a misfortune; he felt as if every unit he joined was doomed to be disbanded, leaving him high and dry, unwanted and superfluous.

Again the same odious, humiliating fear he had first felt when General Sereda's division was disbanded crept into his heart—fear of life outside the army, on his own. Chokhov still could not imagine what he would do if he were demobilized. Indeed, he felt perhaps even more strongly than before that he could not live without the army, that he was attached to his men both as human beings and as soldiers.

Remembering that Vorobeitsev was waiting for him, he returned to the barracks. He found the captain lying on a bench, sending up smoke rings to the dark ceiling. Next to him sat Sakunenko. The two had been talking about a great many things, mainly speculating on the decisions of the three-power conference which had not yet been published.

"As I see it," Sakunenko was saying, "now that Germany's been taken in hand she's going to be kept toeing

the mark for a great many years. On the other hand, I expect our esteemed allies to make a play for German support in order to put something over on us."

He spoke slowly and deliberately, while Vorobeitsev continued blowing smoke rings towards the ceiling.

"Your sergeant-major ought to be working in the Foreign Office," Vorobeitsev said to Chokhov when the latter returned. "He's been lecturing me on the world situation for a whole hour."

"What about yourself?" Sakunenko said with a faint touch of annoyance.

"Me?" Vorobeitsev thought for a moment. "I wish they'd make me commandant in Potsdam. I'd have all of you fellows goose-stepping down the streets. No, I'd make you run, the way the Japanese soldiers do."

"That's why you aren't the commandant," said Sakunenko.

"By the way, the Big Three conference is over," Vorobeitsev said. "My house has been vacated too, although they cleaned out all the furniture. But to hell with that. What about moving to my place, Chokhov? Of course you'll be hanging round the personnel section again. Though it's about time for me to get a billet somewhere myself. They're bound to tighten the screws so that a fellow can't remain a free agent." He glanced at Chokhov's grim face and added with a sigh, "Cheer up, man. You'll get an appointment, don't worry."

21

Vorobeitsev arranged everything. He talked to Major Khlyabin in the personnel section and to several others of his acquaintances. He took care, however, to say nothing about it to Chokhov, for he already knew the

captain too well. It was only after it was all settled that he returned to the hostel where Chokhov sat gloomily killing time, and announced:

"Well, it's in the bag. You are now at the disposal of the Soviet Military Administration, which means you have to report to the section at once for your papers."

Chokhov, who was sitting at the table with his back to Vorobeitsev writing busily, gave no sign that he heard. When at last he turned round, Vorobeitsev saw with surprise that his face was radiant.

"Heard the news?"

"What news?"

"We've declared war on Japan."

He held out a sheet of paper. It was a formal application to be dispatched for active service to the Far Eastern Front. Vorobeitsev's jaw dropped when he read it.

"Don't be an ass," he said. "Do you want to be bombed again or what? Let the others do some fighting for a change. I know for a fact the forces over there have been hanging round on the frontiers for four years doing nothing but waiting. You're an infant, I swear, Chokhov."

Chokhov paid no heed to him and went off at once to submit his application. It was accepted and he was told that he would receive an answer in due course.

He spent the rest of the day beside the radio listening in to Moscow. The next morning he heard the first news bulletin from the Far Eastern Front. Its wording had the same effect on him as a bugle call on an old cavalry horse.

"On the morning of August 9 the Soviet troops in the Far East crossed the frontier of Manchuria over a wide front in the Primorye area, in the vicinity of Khabarovsk, and the Trans-Baikal area. In the Primorye area, our troops, overcoming strong resistance, broke through

the Japanese permanent defences and in the course of the day advanced fifteen kilometres. In the Khabarovsk area our troops crossed the Amur and Ussuri rivers at a number of points, occupying the town of Fuyuan and several other inhabited points. In the Trans-Baikal area our troops, overcoming furious resistance, took by storm the Japanese fortified belt and occupied the towns and railway stations of Manchuria and Jalainur. In the area of Buir-Nur Lake our troops captured the inhabited points Jinjin Sume and Khoshu Sume, encountering little resistance. All in all our troops advanced from 15 to 22 kilometres on August 9. Our air force struck at the main railway junctions of Manchuria: Harbin, Changchun and Kirin, and the ports of Seishin and Rashin."

Although the place names sounded strange to Chokhov's ear, accustomed to the European theatre of hostilities, everything else in the bulletin seemed pleasantly familiar. Indeed it could be safely asserted that if there was one place in the world where Chokhov yearned to be at that moment it was Manchuria.

He now spent days on end in the personnel section, and he who was always so timid and self-effacing in his dealings with his chiefs now plucked up courage and came several times a day to inquire with grim persistence about the fate of his application.

But this did not go on for long because four days later Japan surrendered unconditionally. The next day the radio brought the news that the Japanese War Minister, Korethica Anami, had committed suicide, and that the Japanese troops were giving themselves up by the thousand.

Chokhov seemed to hear the din of battle gradually dying down and the army moving slower and slower.

And so, his application remaining unanswered, Chokhov collected his papers, took his little wooden suitcase

and went off to Karlshorst in the south-eastern suburbs of Berlin to report for work in the SMAG, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany.

Among the dozen or so officers who had also come to Karlshorst to receive their appointments was Vorobeitsev. He was well dressed and in excellent spirits. Here too his self-assured manner had its effect and he was put in charge of a group of officers who were being sent on to Halle. His attitude to his temporary appointment was characteristic: when the group came out into the street, he raised his hand, winked to all of them and said:

"You're all big boys now, and officers besides. You can take care of yourselves. There's nothing like being independent. But of course I expect you to get to Halle in good time so as not to let me down and repay kindness with black ingratitude. Well, *au revoir*, boys!"

The officers laughed and went off, leaving Vorobeitsev and Chokhov alone in the street.

"Tired of being in the reserve?" Chokhov asked, with a sidelong glance at Vorobeitsev's drooping profile.

"I believe in keeping in step with the times," said the other. "And times have changed. Things are getting back to normal. You soon won't find captains living in posh villas. I realized this just the other day when they put me in the doghouse. The drill-ground does wonders to you if you've got nimble wits."

He turned into a side-street and signed to Chokhov to follow him. There, under the shady lime-trees, stood a car—not the old Steyr Vorobeitsev had owned before, but a brand-new one.

Perched on the seat was a huge boxer with a silver-embossed collar round its neck. Vorobeitsev glanced stealthily at Chokhov to see how the fierce-looking animal had impressed him, but Chokhov merely patted its head absently as if he had known it all his life.

"Step in," invited Vorobeitsev, opening the door. "How do you like the bus? It's an Opel Kapitan. We'll ride in comfort this time."

Chokhov listened with only half an ear to Vorobeitsev's feeble jokes as they drove through Berlin. Although the streets were already cleared of debris it was still difficult to imagine where the crowds of Berliners scurrying about among the ruins actually lived.

Vorobeitsev stopped several times to ask the way. At last they reached Alexanderplatz, a vast square surrounded by the skeletons of tall buildings. From here the road led straight to the West, past the scenes of battles that had made recent history. On the way they passed the Reichstag and the seething crowd of black-market speculators in front of it.

In Potsdam Vorobeitsev stopped at the army commissary stores where some acquaintances of his worked. He came out carrying a large parcel which he carefully placed on the back seat. Then they drove to the hostel and loaded Vorobeitsev's belongings into the car. At the latter's suggestion they sat for a moment or two in their room before setting out on their journey in deference to the old Russian custom. For some reason Vorobeitsev's mood had changed to one of melancholy, and he drove for a long time in silence.

They passed Beelitz and Wittenberg, which Chokhov remembered quite well, and crossed a bridge over the Elbe. The road ran between rows of tall poplars. Some two kilometres outside of Wittenberg the road was blocked by a crowd of people who were shouting and gesturing wildly.

Vorobeitsev stopped the car and, putting on his most official air, went up to investigate. Chokhov followed. A strange and terrible scene met their eyes. The crowd, which included women and children—all of them unquestionably Russians—were attacking one man. In a

frenzy of fury and hatred they were beating him with their fists, with sticks, with everything they could lay hands on. Each of them tried to deal him a mortal blow, but since there were a great many of them, they got in each other's way and their victim managed to keep his feet. His head, his face and his black beard were smeared with blood, and blood trickled down his naked chest and his torn shirt. He was a tall, lean man. He stared wildly about him with dilated eyes. His feet were bare, his thin, sunburned arms were outstretched before him, and he seemed to be groping blindly for a way out. But he did not try to defend himself. He fell again and again under the heavy blows, but each time he got up and stood dazed, waiting for the next blow to fall. The crowd was out to kill him, and they were doing it deliberately, furiously, and ineptly.

"What's going on? What are you doing?" Vorobeitsev, pale as death, asked a man at the edge of the crowd. The question sounded timid and frightened instead of commanding.

The man turned and, seeing a Soviet uniform, he said:

"A traitor. He was a policeman in a German prison camp. Grew a beard and thought nobody would recognize him. But it didn't work."

With these words the man rushed forward and struck the bruised and bleeding traitor a blow in the side with something sharp. Instantly a dark-red stain spread over the shirt.

The attacker leapt back quickly and, turning his large face to Vorobeitsev, said through clenched teeth, "The bastard. He murdered plenty of our fellows."

"But . . . but he ought to be put on trial. Better turn him over to the authorities. You can't do this. . . ."

The man did not answer. Instead he crouched and sprang forward again. But this time he was forestalled by an old woman who with a cry of "There, take that

for Mitka!" struck the traitor a feeble blow but with such a look of hatred on her face that Vorobeitsev shuddered. He moved away.

"A traitor," he said to Chokhov hoarsely. "They identified him. . . ."

Chokhov went over and stood for a minute watching the scene coldly. Noting the look in his eyes, some of the people moved aside, thinking perhaps that he too wished to participate in the killing or to put a stop to it and take the criminal in custody. But Chokhov stood motionless; not a muscle of his face moved. Then he turned sharply and walked over to the car.

"If I wasn't in uniform," he said, getting in beside Vorobeitsev, "I'd have finished him."

One side of the road was now open and they drove on in heavy silence.

22

In the large ugly house on Steintor Square in Halle where the Soviet Military Administration of Saxony-Anhalt had its headquarters at that time, Chokhov and Vorobeitsev met the other officers who had come here from Karlshorst to get their appointments. After having something to eat in the canteen, they all set out to look at the city.

It was an industrial town with a very old university. On Market Square stood a monument to Handel, who was born in Halle. A sombre cathedral and an ancient town hall, badly damaged by bombs, were the principal sights.

On returning to headquarters they were received by the colonel in charge who after a brief interview gave them appointments to the various provinces. Chokhov, Vorobeitsev and several other officers were to go to Altstadt. They left at once and soon reached their destination.

General Kuprianov was holding an important conference when they arrived and they settled down on couches in the upstairs hall to wait. At last a door opened and the officers came out, about forty in all. Presently the general appeared. Chokhov and his companions sprang to their feet.

"You're the newcomers, I suppose?" the general said.

"Yes, Comrade General," Vorobeitsev replied smartly on behalf of the others, saluting.

"Good, very good," said the general. "I'll attend to you in a minute."

He went off leaving the officers in a similarly genial frame of mind, perhaps because the general's manner and indeed the whole atmosphere of the place lacked the stiff formality which (often for no good reason) so often is the rule in Soviet military organizations.

Suddenly Chokhov's attention was caught by something familiar about one of the officers standing with his back to him nearby smoking in a group of other officers. He was about to rush over but checked himself, for fear he might be mistaken. But no, it was Major Lubentsov. That light brown hair, those shoulders and particularly that characteristic gesture of his right hand when he spoke—at once free and restrained, quick, but decisive—could not belong to anyone else. At that moment the officer laughed, throwing back his head slightly and Chokhov's last doubts were removed. Nevertheless, unwilling as usual to thrust himself on anyone, he stayed where he was. Lubentsov, chancing to turn his head, caught sight of him, and his face lit up.

"Chokhov?" he said uncertainly and stepped towards him. For a second they stood looking at each other, then Lubentsov strode over and clasped him in a quick, strong embrace.

"So you're going to work in some commandant's office, too?"

"Yes, Comrade Major," Chokhov replied, thrown into confusion by the embrace and by the faintly mocking tone he thought he detected in Lubentsov's words, and also by the fact that he had forgotten that Lubentsov was a lieutenant-colonel now.

"Splendid," said Lubentsov. He thought for a moment, then slapped Chokhov on the shoulder. "You'll come to my office. I have a few vacancies left. I'll see to it at once. Get your stuff together and come with me."

He took hold of Chokhov's elbow and was about to march him off somewhere when a long arm reached out to him and someone said in as brisk and energetic a tone as Lubentsov's own:

"Don't you recognize me, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel? Captain Vorobeitsev from Ops. Greetings from General Sereda. Saw him the other day in Berlin. He's going home, you know. They say he's going to be given an army corps. Asked about you, by the way, wanted to know what had become of you. I told him you'd been appointed commandant."

Vorobeitsev knew what to say. He had not met Sereda at all; he had only overheard in the personnel section something about the general having left or being about to leave for home, but he thought there was no harm in conveying greetings to the lieutenant-colonel.

"Sizokrilov has been summoned to Moscow," he went on airily. "They say he's going to be made Vice-Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Not bad, eh? I got that from Taras Petrovich himself."

Perhaps Vorobeitsev's only mistake was that he spoke too loudly. At any rate Lubentsov—though he listened attentively, smiling to himself at some memories of Sereda and Sizokrilov—did not let go of Chokhov's elbow, and as soon as Vorobeitsev had finished, he said, "Come on," and hurried his friend off.

Chokhov cast an apologetic look at Vorobeitsev over his shoulder. He felt very awkward about Lubentsov's failure to show any interest whatever in Vorobeitsev; nevertheless he allowed himself to be led down the long corridor, and it was only after a minute or two that he ventured to make a timid suggestion.

"Couldn't you take the captain to your office too?"

"Captain who? Oh, that Vorobeitsev? I don't seem to remember much about him. But we'll see what we can do."

They entered a room and Lubentsov speedily arranged to have Chokhov appointed as one of the assistants to the commandant of Lauterburg. He was about to go when Chokhov timidly reminded him:

"What about Vorobeitsev?"

"Oh yes," said Lubentsov absently and asked for Vorobeitsev's file.

They sat down together on the couch while Lubentsov leafed through Vorobeitsev's service record.

"Seems to be all right. Good testimonials: 'energetic,' 'efficient,' 'loyal to the cause.' 'Born in Moscow.' 'Vain,' it says. Well, that's nothing. Father, mother.... Everything in order there. Wonderful things questionnaires. Give you everything in a nutshell."

Chokhov hurried back to the hall where he found Vorobeitsev standing gloomily by the window. When he saw Chokhov he turned to look out of the window.

"We're both going to the Lauterburg commandant's office," said Chokhov. "Leaving at once."

Vorobeitsev made no attempt to hide his joy. Slapping Chokhov on the back as Lubentsov had done, he whispered:

"That's fine. It's not the job that matters, I don't much care where I work. But it's always pleasant to be working with people you know. Lubentsov's a first-rate chap. Thanks, Vasya, you've done me a good turn. Besides, Lauterburg is a nice place. I've inquired. Ever

heard of the Harz Mountains? Supposed to be pretty nice. All sorts of poems written about them."

Chokhov was upset. He was furious with Vorobeitsev for having put him in the unpleasant and humiliating position of having to ask favours. And he was angry with himself for putting in a word for a man whom he did not particularly like or respect. This friendship, thrust upon him against his will, had now spoiled all his pleasure in meeting a true friend, the only person perhaps in the world he really loved and admired.

But by the time Lubentsov reappeared some few minutes later Chokhov had already calmed down. After all, he told himself, surely there could be no harm in Vorobeitsev's serving in the same office.

Lubentsov was accompanied by a young, pink-faced and plumpish captain in glasses through which peered a pair of large blue eyes with the benign expression of a contented babe.

"This is Captain Yavorsky, another new recruit for our office," Lubentsov said, looking at the captain with the fond look of a parent at his child. "He will be in charge of propaganda. He has a degree in philology. Captain, these are our new officers. They're no scholars but good, honest lads just the same. And so, Comrades, you must love one another, as the Bible says."

The four went outside. When Lubentsov heard that Vorobeitsev had a car of his own, he laughed.

"I see you haven't been letting the grass grow under your feet," he remarked.

It was decided that Yavorsky would ride with Vorobeitsev and Chokhov with Lubentsov.

On the way Lubentsov talked mainly about the district he was to administer. Chokhov would much rather have turned the conversation to the war, their fighting experiences, the siege of Schneidemühl and the Potsdam battles. But Lubentsov had obviously lost interest in all that.

"The main problem now," he said, "is to carry out a democratic land reform. We don't intend to interfere directly, for this is an internal German affair. It would be very dangerous and unwise to try to put it through at the point of the bayonet, so to speak. But a land reform has long been due. It was part of the democratic platform a hundred years ago. The feudal system of landownership must be abolished in Germany—it is a hotbed of imperialism." He looked sharply at Chokhov. "You will have to read up on Germany. I have managed to collect a rather big library on the German question. I am going to learn the language. I would advise you to do the same. I want to be as thorough as possible once fate and the army command have decreed that I am to be the commandant of a German district."

"I'm afraid I shan't be much good for this sort of work," said Chokhov. "I can command a company, but that's about all I can do."

"Never mind, old man, you'll learn. Besides, the important thing is to be conscientious. It sounds easy, I know, but how difficult it is in practice, especially when you are placed in a position of authority, when you know that your word has almost the force of law. But if a man is not a moron, if he—how shall I put it—if he loves his fellow-men, it's enough for him to be conscientious. Now what about you, Chokhov, do you love your fellow-men?" Lubentsov asked with a laugh.

"I don't know," Chokhov replied flushing. "I never thought about it."

Neither spoke for some time.

"I asked to be sent to the Far East," Chokhov said, breaking the silence. "But the war there ended too quickly."

"Thank God it did," said Lubentsov. "Haven't you had enough of war?" He paused and added, "My wife didn't ask to be sent, but she had to go. She's in Muk-

den now. Her division was rushed across the whole of Russia at a moment's notice. I'm only hoping Tanya will be able to get demobilized now it's all over. It's easy enough to live without a wife when you're a bachelor. But when you're married it's hell to be separated, believe me."

Lauterburg came into sight. Outside the commandant's office they were met by Voronin who recognized Chokhov at once and was delighted to see him. Chokhov was much impressed by the appearance of the office building, and indeed, thanks to the combined efforts of Lubentsov, Voronin and Albina, it had lost all its erstwhile civilian exterior and looked quite imposing. Even the caryatids ceased to seem frivolous with the Russian sentry standing under them, his face vying in severity with the ancient statue of Roland on the other side of the street.

The Soviet national flag flew from the flagstaff.

THE TALE OF THE SIX SOLDIERS

They crossed the Oder over a war-time pontoon bridge.

Both banks of the river were littered with damaged and abandoned guns and cut up by trenches and tank pits. But the young green grass was already spreading its carpet over the lacerated earth and the shell-crippled trees were giving off new shoots.

When the driver pulled up on the western bank, the six soldiers jumped down, stripped and waded into the river. Nebaba swam far out. When he came back he said:

"I saw lorries at the river bottom." And lowering his voice: "And men too."

The ambulance driver came over.

"Where are you fellows going?" he asked. "We're heading north from here. Our outfit's up north."

"You're not going to hit Berlin?"

"No. Too many patrols there. It's quieter driving through the small towns."

"We're going to Berlin," Veretennikov said. "Got to locate our outfit."

"What do you want your outfit for?" asked the driver. "You come with us. Our brigade's stationed at the sea-side, with gulls and plenty of fish and nice scenery. Supposing you report there. You'll soon be going home

anyway. Just now you're sort of tourists. If I didn't have to account for the bus I'd make a nice tour of Europe."

"Won't do," said Veretennikov. "Some other time."

The driver laughed and went back to his car, and the six soldiers set out on foot. There were a good many lorries going their way, but they preferred to walk.

They passed neglected fields over which flocks of crows were wheeling with raucous cries as if at a loss to understand the barrenness of the once fertile farmlands. The towns and villages they passed through lay in ruins.

They spoke seldom, but missed little of the things that came within their range of vision. Only Petukhov, who had always been the most uncommunicative of the lot, could not get over the fact that he had not known they had passed Warsaw.

"Imagine missing Warsaw," he would say. "I could kick myself for it. I remember shouting 'To Warsaw!' until I was hoarse at Red Army meetings way back in nineteen twenty, and I had to go right through the place without even seeing it. We'll be missing Berlin too if we don't look out!"

Then came the usual indications of proximity to a big city. Power lines appeared, and then tall buildings with huge advertisements of firms that no longer existed and of newspapers that had been banned. Time and again the six walked past suburban railway stations with their high platforms. Finally they were in the suburbs proper. As they marched on through the pleasant-looking housing estates that had hardly suffered from the war they noted there were more and more people round and marvelled at there being so many Germans left in Germany.

Another sunset crimsoned the eastern sky. They had seen many sunsets since they took to the road, but this

one seemed different—this sunset that cast its rays over a great city so strange, so very foreign! They were not allowed to stop for long to admire it, however, for a Soviet military patrol hailed them and promptly escorted them to the commandant's office. At first they were dumbfounded by the suddenness with which the army put an end to the leisurely, measured pace of life to which they had already become accustomed, and sucked them into the vortex of its throbbing, unceasing activity. First they were sent with a couple of hundred other soldiers like them to an airfield to clear away the wreckage of planes from the runways and to repair the bomb-damaged hangars. Two weeks later they were loaded on lorries and taken to rebuild a bridge across the Spree in the very centre of Berlin. If they ever recalled the journey they had taken, it was only as a fading memory of something that had happened in the distant past. They did so only during rest breaks, or in the evenings before turning in, and mostly on the initiative of Nebaba, who would turn to one of his pals and ask, "Remember that Pole?..." or "Remember that driver chap?..." or some other question of the same order. The others would only smile in reply.

All but Veretennikov. He alone was not reconciled to their present status. The thought worried him that divisional headquarters might be looking for them and the hay that very minute, and that people there might be cursing him up and down and saying he wasn't the type to be trusted. These anxious thoughts prompted him one day to approach a lieutenant-colonel who had come to inspect the bridge site. The lieutenant-colonel, who turned out to be the irascible, impatient type, pounced on the lieutenant in charge even before he had heard Veretennikov to the end.

"You have no cause to detain these men, Lieutenant. Let them join their unit."

And so, quite unexpectedly, the six found themselves to be an independent detail once more.

They walked out of Berlin, still heading west, towards the town where, as Veretennikov had learned at the commandant's office, the division was now stationed. The closer they got to their destination the grimmer the sergeant grew, and the more frequently he cast dark looks at Petukhov. At first Petukhov could not understand it, but then the truth dawned on him: Veretennikov was worried about the hay! The receipt he carried in his pocket was for a quantity less than had been left in their keeping. Petukhov personally was not worried—bigger mistakes than this had been made in papers. But gradually Veretennikov's anxiety began to weigh on his mind too, and he sighed loudly and plucked his moustache in anticipation of the explanations that would have to be made.

At last they arrived. The town, which overlooked the Elbe, was as clean as if it had just been washed by a summer shower. And the people were neat and polite, especially the children. While Veretennikov was in the commandant's office making inquiries, the rest of the detail settled down in a public garden to talk with local children, using sign language to augment the few German words they had managed to pick up. The children in their turn knew a good many Russian words. Zuyev gave them each a biscuit and a lump of sugar, but the children did not eat them; instead, they put them in their pockets, thanking the soldiers and explaining that they would take them home to their mothers. The soldiers were touched.

Veretennikov learned that the division had moved on the week before beyond the Elbe, where it was to take over from some American units that were being withdrawn. He passed the news on to his men, and they set out again.

They crossed the Elbe over a bridge and saw before them a lush expanse of flat country covered with orchards and gardens. The day was warm and sunny. Motor traffic, both army vehicles and German lorries, sped over the road in two steady streams—one headed west, the other east.

"Shall we walk or ride?" Veretennikov asked.

"Might as well ride," said Koroteyev, sensing that the sergeant wanted to lose no more time than he could help.

"One of ours or a German lorry?"

"Let's try a German."

Veretennikov raised his arm and a German lorry jammed on its brakes. It turned out to be going just where the men wanted, and two hours later they reached their destination. A sergeant they ran into by chance directed them to a military encampment just outside the town. The brick barracks, however, turned out to be deserted, except for two lieutenants and a sergeant-major who had been drinking heavily and were not in the least interested in the newcomers' worries. According to them, the division did not exist any more. It had been disbanded. They offered the soldiers wine, and gave them as much bread and tinned rations as they could carry; they even tried to palm off a stack of old quilted jackets they did not know what to do with. In the end they advised the six to go back to town and look up the reserve regiment stationed there.

The soldiers sat around for a while and then went to the regiment, where Petukhov, Koroteyev and Atabekov learned that they had been out of the army for a full two weeks, since their age groups had been demobilized. They were issued the necessary papers at once and the next day they left for Russia.

Veretennikov, Zuyev and Nebaba remained in the regiment, but only for a short time, for soon they and

another fifteen men under a young lieutenant were sent to a larger town nearby. Here they were informed that they had been assigned to the commandant of some German town with an unpronounceable name. In due time they left for their new post.

The three men, a little saddened at parting with their comrades, sat on top of the lorry watching the scenery. The road ran at first through flat country, but gradually the plain began to gather into folds, and the farther they advanced the higher and more frequent the folds became. They rose in terraces of three or four tiers. The lower tier was taken up with beetroot, cabbage and potato fields, bordered by rows of trees. Beyond, where the ground began to rise gently, spread fields of rye or oats. The third tier was covered with cherry orchards, or fields of white poppies, or some yellow flowers whose name the soldiers did not know. At the very top was the dark fringe of pine forests.

They entered the Harz, a realm of peace and stillness where the only sounds were the singing of birds and the gentle murmur of brooks. Huge moss-grown boulders were scattered among the trees. Gradually the road began to descend and before long a town came into sight.

"Is that it?" the soldiers asked one another.

"Looks like it."

They all livened up.

After driving through several streets of ruins, the lorry pulled up on a large square outside a house flying the Soviet flag. Opposite the house stood a huge church damaged by a bomb. In the middle of the square was a garden with tall old trees.

The soldiers jumped off the lorry, stretched their stiffened limbs, and crowded together at the entrance where the sentry stood. Windows were thrown open in the house, and excited commotion was heard within and

in a few minutes a young lieutenant-colonel with merry blue eyes and a brisk manner came out, followed by several other officers and a girl in civilian clothes.

"At ease," the lieutenant-colonel said, rubbing his hands with evident pleasure. "I'm very glad you've come." He scanned their faces eagerly and when his eyes met Veretennikov's they both smiled. "This is your home now," he went on, now looking at Veretennikov directly, "the whole ground floor will be yours, for barracks, canteen and club. There's plenty of room." He turned to a tall colonel who came out of the building at that moment. "My platoon has arrived, Comrade Sokolov. Your men won't have to serve the commandant's office any more. I am sure you have had enough of us." The colonel smiled, and the lieutenant-colonel (who was obviously the commandant) turned to the soldiers again, and went on, this time in a grave, earnest tone, "You have been entrusted with the important task of representing the Soviet Union. I am sure I do not need to tell you what that means. We will all work together and help each other. We have all seen much and gone through a great deal. You are young men, but old soldiers, and I don't need to tell you much. It will not be easy for any of us being so far away from home, and in general army service, especially under such unusual conditions, is not always easy. But if we live together amicably, if we share our joys and sorrows, if we always remember to do our duty, it won't be so hard. You already know your commander. He came with you. Now let me introduce Sergeant-Major Voronin, who has been appointed assistant commander. The sergeants among you will command the sections."

This speech raised Veretennikov's spirits still more. He liked the commandant, and so did the other soldiers.

The platoon was just about to enter the house when a stout German woman with a nose like a potato and

a big wart on her chin, and wearing an apron over her red sweater and skirt, came up to the commandant. Smiling apologetically, she addressed him in German and handed him a paper.

The dark, stern-faced girl who stood beside the commandant translated:

"She asks you whether you remember her."

"Of course I do," laughed the commandant. "We met the day I arrived here."

The girl translated to the woman who threw up her head in triumph and emitted a flood of rapid German.

"She says that all the people who live in her house respect you very much and she has come to you to complain about the town authorities. They were supposed to repair the house, but they keep putting the tenants off with promises. The tenants believe that the Soviet commandant is always ready to help poor people and knowing that she is acquainted with the commandant they delegated her to ask him to get the bürgermeister to keep his promise."

The commandant smiled again and said he would see what he could do.

"Tell her," he added, "that she did well to come here Criticism is an excellent thing. Tell her that she and her neighbours must write to the papers about any other shortcomings they know of, to the Volkszeitung,* *for instance."*

When the girl translated this, the woman opened her eyes wide, burst out laughing and threw up her hands with a comical gesture.

"Me write? I'm no writer," she said. "I'm just a plain housewife. I have four children. But I can't stand dishonesty. I can't stand folks who don't keep their prom-

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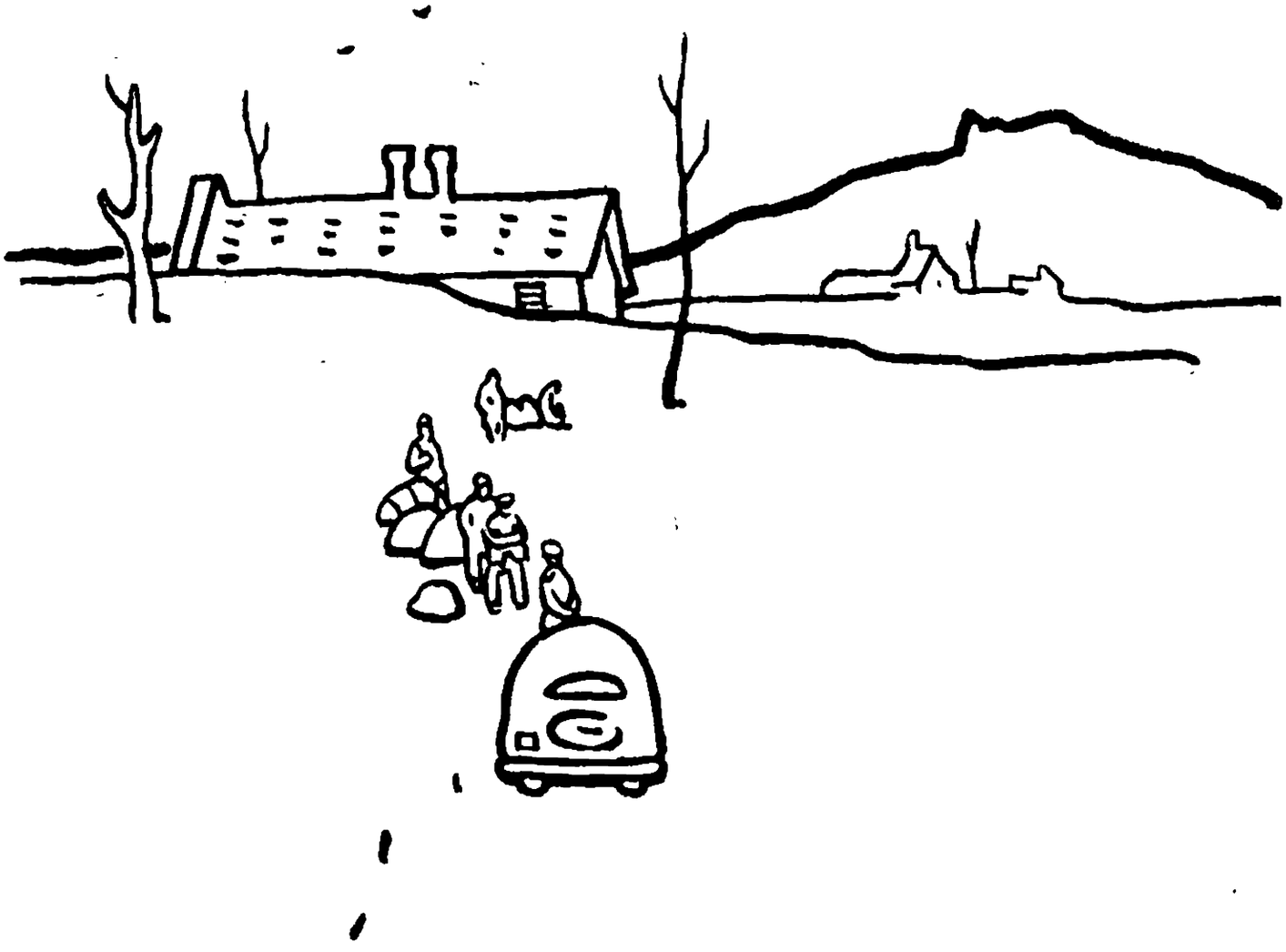
* At that time the organ of the Communist Party in Saxony-Anhalt.

ises, who're always talking about 'the people' but who don't lift a finger to help them." She paused for a moment and added in a low voice, "My husband was killed in the war. If only he had died for something worth while." She took out a handkerchief to wipe away the tears that suddenly gushed forth.

A silence fell as the interpreter translated these words. The men's faces were grave. Then the lieutenant quietly gave the command and the soldiers passed in single file through the wide-open doors.

PART TWO

The Land



1

The city of Lauterburg watched the commandant's office with close and guarded attention.

The commandant's office was open to anyone who had any request to make or complaint to lodge, nevertheless it lived its own life, withdrawn and a trifle mysterious. It was connected by telephone and radio with Altstadt,

Halle, Berlin and, evidently, with Moscow as well. Messengers were constantly arriving in Soviet Army cars to deliver sealed envelopes and coded messages.

The blue-eyed commandant—a young but very intelligent and efficient lieutenant-colonel, who knew German quite well but pretended not to (as had been observed on many occasions), and English too, though he pretended not to know that language either (this rumour was spread by old Kranz)—drove around the district a great deal, appearing in the most unexpected places. He seemed never to sleep and his capacity for work amazed everyone. He read a great deal too, and had bought a large number of German books in Hans Minden's bookshop. It was noticed that at first he had bought grammars and school readers, then guidebooks and diverse reference books on Germany, later began to ask for detective stories, and finally passed on to the classics, one day purchasing a complete set of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and Uhland. Sometimes he drove around the town at night, or went for long walks, turning up now at a restaurant, now at a hotel, now at a cinema. He visited the cathedral and the castle, issued the town hall special licences for building materials to repair these historical monuments, ordered damaged houses to be repaired without delay, and so on.

He had earned the nickname of "Oberstleutnant Davai-Davai" because his instructions to clear away the rubble in the streets, to repair an automobile, to start a factory, or open a shop would invariably wind up with that strange Russian word whose meaning was not clear but which sounded at once like a command and a blessing. The nickname itself contained both a touch of raillery at the commandant's over-fondness for that particular word, and recognition of his dynamic energy.

He had a passion, this young man, for putting everybody to work. The sight of idleness or slovenliness caused

him deep, almost childish, distress. At such times his voice, usually rather high-pitched, would drop to almost a bass and he would say in a tone of hurt bewilderment:

"Look here! That won't do, you know! That won't do at all." Then his voice would return to its normal pitch and in his usual rapid and confident manner he would utter those familiar Russian words which had become almost proverbial for the Germans: "We've got to work, you know. *Davai, davai*!"

The office itself was given a nickname. It was known locally as "the House on the Square." That name evoked different emotions in different people. In some it inspired fear, in others respect. In some hostility, in others confidence. Some people referred to the office thus in order to avoid saying the real name. With others the name had a friendly, even caressing ring. At any rate the House on the Square had firmly established itself in the life of Lauterburg town and province. Its activities were the subject of diverse comment, but no one could deny the fact that the House on the Square was doing its best to bring order into the lives of the townsfolk, to restore industry and trade to normal. It was not always successful, but it scrupulously sought to carry out all the decisions of the Potsdam Conference—it was dismantling military plants, it had instituted a search for war criminals, and was removing from their posts in private as well as state institutions all persons who had been active functionaries of the nazi party.

As for what went on within the commandant's office, that was discussed in whispers: "Someone has arrived at the House on the Square"; "There was an important conference in the House on the Square. The General was present"; "Something is afoot in the House on the Square, they are in conference"; "The House on the Square won't allow it"; "The House on the Square is

liable to interfere"; "We'll have to ask the House on the Square to intervene."

The Lauterburgians turned out to be rather good judges of character, and it was not long before they had sized up all the occupants of the House on the Square fairly accurately. Kasatkin was not generally liked; although he was just, he was also very strict, perhaps because he did not yet see the Germans as people but merely as objects of the commandants' administrative functions. Captain Chegodayev had a reputation for being hot-tempered but not malicious. He might kick up a row but he would soon calm down, get to the root of the trouble and make a fair decision that would be in the interests of both the Soviet administration and the Germans. With the workers he was always pleasant, although he often reproached them for having been too submissive under Hitler, for not having rebelled or gone on strike.

Captain Yavorsky was respected for his excellent knowledge of German, his pleasant manners and kind heart, which some were not slow to take advantage of for their own ends. But he had one failing—he never acted independently and nearly always ended up his extremely intelligent and sensible remarks and advice with the words: "In any case I shall take it up with the commandant."

Captain Vorobeitsev was not liked in Lauterburg. It was impossible to tell what was likely to please him and what would arouse his anger. Like the others, he was courteous in his dealings with ordinary working people, but was harsh and even rude towards all employers, big and small alike. However, the various factory-owners, shopkeepers, tradesmen, proprietors of tailoring, shoemaking and like establishments soon discovered that this captain did not exactly scorn material benefits, and believed in enjoying life. They did not share this secret with one another but they all made use of it as much as

they could. At the same time they feared him perhaps more than any of the other officers because of his ungovernable temper and his sharp tongue, because he knew their business inside out and could spot unerringly the slightest violation of Control Council laws and Administration regulations.

With Captain Chokhov and Senior Lieutenant Menshov the townsfolk had few dealings since the former was occupied chiefly with the Soviet Army men who came to town, finding quarters for them, arranging for their board and lodging, etc., while Menshov spent most of his time in the countryside.

As for the commandant himself, a rather complicated relationship was soon formed between him and the population of the town. Although he faithfully carried out all the measures aimed ultimately at the elimination of Germany's war potential, and although he strictly enforced all the existing rules and regulations, nevertheless before very long there were few people in the town who did not cherish a warm, if undemonstrative, friendship for Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov. This was because all his actions were prompted not only by a sense of duty, but by a deep personal conviction that everything he did was vitally necessary. He was interested in everything—in schools, factories, kindergartens, the quality of factory output, seed for planting, petrol, coal, etc.—not because it was his duty to concern himself with all these things, but because he honestly believed them to be essential to the welfare of the people in the area he administered. And the people sensed this. If in the case of Kasatkin they felt that his concern for the welfare of the population was dictated not by any personal feeling but by his official capacity; if Yavorsky brought to his work the somewhat abstract approach of a mathematician to the solution of an absorbing problem; if in the behaviour of Chegodayev, Menshov and to some extent of Vorobeitsev as

well, there was a shade of youthful vanity and pride in the knowledge that they had the power to influence the lives of so many people, in Lubentsov there was nothing of the kind. In him duty and human feeling were totally merged.

He never attempted to hide the bitter truth from the Germans. In this respect he was perhaps over-pedantic and he never missed an opportunity to remind them of their great crime against the Soviet people and the necessity of atoning for their guilt. Constant contact between the Russians and their former enemies in their official capacity and especially in everyday life tended to dull the memory of past sins. People are much the same everywhere. Lauterburg laughed at the same jokes as Tambov, wept over the same slights as Khabarovsk, blushed at the same obscenities and paled at the same insults. And these innumerable human similarities could not but bring the Russians and Germans closer together. Lubentsov understood this and in his heart of hearts he did not resent it. What he wanted was that what had been should not be forgotten, for that alone justified his and his comrades' presence here, justified that curtailment of rights without which the Germans could not enter the family of free nations.

Lubentsov received callers in his private office, a large well-lighted room which had once served as boardroom for a joint stock company, the Lauterburg A.G. It was furnished with a large desk covered with green baize, a safe, a long conference table placed against the desk in such a way as to form that letter "T" so beloved of bureaucrats. The conference table was covered with a green table-cloth to match the baize on the desk—Voronin, who had dug up the cloth somewhere, had been extremely proud of his elegant taste. Portraits of Lenin and Stalin hung on the wall to the left of the desk. On the right were two large windows. Later on, Voronin brought

portraits of Marx and Engels from the Soviet Military Administration: he considered it highly appropriate that the portraits of these two great Germans, the connecting links, as it were, between the ideological life of both countries, should hang in the office of the Soviet commandant.

Under the portraits was a map of the district on which Lubentsov had had a local artist draw tiny heaps of coal briquets, fish, horses, hogs, ears of rye, carrots, miniature factories with tall chimneys and other symbols representing the natural resources and industries of the area.

Behind the glass doors of the bookcase stood the numerous reference books Lubentsov had acquired, dealing with the economy and history of the area, pamphlets, solid tomes, guide-books. In the same bookcase Lubentsov kept a detailed card index file wherein he recorded miscellaneous items of information concerning every town, village and hamlet in the district. He made the entries himself, jotting down figures on tax income, output of farm produce for the market, timber workings, increase in dairy cattle and sheep, fish catch, factory plan fulfilment as well as brief biographies of bürgermeisters, schoolteachers, lawyers, party and trade-union functionaries.

News of Lubentsov's index file had reached the townsfolk and all sorts of mysterious rumours were circulated about it. It was whispered that the index contained the personal histories of every citizen of Lauterburg unto the third generation.

Of late the townsfolk could not have failed to notice that the House on the Square had become the scene of feverish activity. Conferences lasting far into the night were continually being held there. Village bürgermeisters and peasants were frequent visitors. Deputations of refugees from Silesia, the Sudeten region and East Prussia had been received by the commandant twice within

the past few weeks. Dust-covered automobiles were constantly driving up to the entrance of the house.

A land reform was about to be introduced. The first inkling of it came from meetings held in the countryside. Farm-hands and poor peasants had applied to the Soviet Administration, asking that the landlords' estates be divided up. Particularly stormy had been the meetings of the refugees. These people, who had lost all their worldly possessions and who lived crowded together in encampments, were now asking for allotments of land to cultivate.

The resolutions of these meetings were printed in the Communist newspaper *Volkszeitung* and the Social-Democrat *Volksblatt*. In due time conferences of the democratic party bloc were held at which representatives of the Communist Party made public the draft of the reform. The draft set forth that all estates of more than one hundred hectares were to be divided up. As for the estates belonging to war criminals, these were to be confiscated without compensation, even those less than a hundred hectares in area. All the land—ploughland, woods and meadows—was to be parcelled out to the peasants, chiefly farm labourers, refugees and the village poor.

2

Now that Lauterburg had been made the administrative centre of the district by order of the Soviet Military Administration, the next step was to set up a district administration. General Kuprianov advised Lubentsov to appoint a non-party man as the *Landrat*, someone who enjoyed some prestige among all sections of the population. Lerche, the new bürgermeister Vorländer and Jost, the police chief, suggested a certain Professor Sebastian for the post. Grellmann and Mauritius supported the

proposal. At Lubentsov's instructions they had approached the professor on the matter, but without success. The professor had declined to assume the post of Landrat.

"Declined?" cried Lubentsov. "That shows you didn't use the correct approach. What sort of a person is he? An honest man? How can an honest man refuse to work at such a difficult time? Where does he live? I'll go and talk to him myself."

"You live in his house," said Jost.

Lubentsov was greatly surprised.

"You mean my landlord!" he exclaimed. "A very reserved gentleman. I haven't laid eyes on him yet. My fault entirely."

The same evening he asked Ksenia to come to his house. While waiting for the interpreter, he went out into the garden and for the first time since he had moved into this house he studied it carefully. He found it in exemplary order. Flower-pots with some exotic-looking plants stood under glass in the small conservatory. At the back of the house was a fountain with a chubby infant holding a bow in its hands.

The sound of a piano floated from the house. "My retiring professor is fond of music," Lubentsov said to himself, looking up at the windows of the ground floor. At that moment the music broke off and a figure in white appeared on the balcony.

It was too dark for Lubentsov to make out the woman's features. Hearing a sound down below she inquired in a musical voice, "*Wer ist da?*" When no reply came, she leaned over the railing and peered into the darkness, then with an exclamation of surprise she withdrew.

Just then the gate creaked. It was Ksenia. As they climbed up the dark staircase it suddenly occurred to Lubentsov that he ought to have telephoned first instead of descending on his host unannounced. But it was too late. On the upper landing a door opened and a light was

switched on. An elderly woman in a white apron and a cap appeared. Lubentsov remembered having seen her before; evidently she was the one who cleaned his rooms in the morning.

"*Herr Kommandant...*" she uttered in a tone of mingled surprise and fear when she saw who it was.

Ksenia said that the commandant wished to see the professor on important business, and she showed them into the drawing-room.

Lubentsov asked Ksenia to say that he apologized for intruding but since the matter was urgent and since it was high time for him to pay his respects to his host and to thank him for his hospitality, he had taken the liberty of dropping in without waiting for an invitation. The old woman went out and a few minutes later a tall man in a dark suit, with youthful features in spite of his white hair, came slowly into the room. He held a pair of glasses in his hand, and on entering he raised them for a moment to his eyes like a lorgnette, but dropped them at once.

After the usual polite exchange, they sat down at a round table. Lubentsov offered the professor a cigarette which was gladly accepted. They lit up and Lubentsov proceeded to state his business without further ado.

Sebastian listened to him in silence, without interrupting him, and when he had finished, thanked Lubentsov for the honour but said he was obliged to decline the offer owing to ill-health, and that in any case he did not think he was competent to assume such a responsible position. He was not an administrator, he was a scientist, a chemist by profession, and if it was possible to have an aim in life, his, Professor Sebastian's, aim was to complete a major research in colloidal chemistry on which he had been working for many years.

In reply Lubentsov said that he could understand the professor's desire to devote himself to peaceful scientific activity, to "what we men of action disdainfully term a

sedentary existence," but he could not agree that for the sake of science which was intended to benefit mankind, one could afford to lose sight of mankind itself. Especially at such a serious and critical period in the life of Germany as this, when it was manifestly the duty of every German, including men of science, to help the nation to get back on its feet.

"It may perhaps strike you as odd," Lubentsov went on, "that an officer of the occupation forces should be trying to persuade a German professor to consider the interests of the German people. Three months ago I myself would have thought it more than strange."

Sebastian laughed. "Yes," he said, "that is a very profound observation."

"You see," Lubentsov went on, "as a representative of the occupation authorities I am interested in seeing democratic institutions firmly established here in Germany. We cannot do this without the participation of the Germans themselves, and particularly without the help of their leading citizens—men of science, intellectuals, that section of the population which must be most keenly alive to the gravity of the situation."

"But why do you come to me particularly?" asked Sebastian.

"Because you have been recommended to me as one of the leading German intellectuals in this town."

"And you believe that if I or someone like me takes over the reins of local government it will be easier for you to achieve your purpose?" Sebastian said this somewhat defiantly, then stopped short and drummed his fingers on the table. He obviously regretted his outburst. He had not intended to be so frank; on the contrary, he wished to be as restrained as possible and not to reveal himself to the commandant in any way.

"Yes, yes!" cried Lubentsov. "That's it precisely! We are in favour of your appointment because we wish to

make use of your prestige here to achieve our purpose. You have put it in a nutshell. Now what are our aims? Do they coincide with yours? And if not, in what respect do they differ? That is the whole question."

He got up and, with a triumphant glance at the professor, continued:

"You hate the nazis. So do we. You are opposed to war. So are we. You are in favour of a strong, free, but peace-loving and democratic Germany. So are we. You know the local conditions, the traditions, the relationships better than we do, hence you must help us, you must correct us if we tend to do thoughtless or stupid things. Accept our offer and you will have boundless opportunity to help us to do our job properly. We shall disagree on many things, no doubt, we shall argue our point of view, and you, yours. But our goal is the same. And you can help us to find the best means of achieving that goal." He sat down as if waiting for a reply, but since the professor was silent, he went on, this time calmly, "The other day I read a book which made a deep impression on me. It is a German book and a very famous one too. To my shame I had never read it before, although I had heard of it, of course, even at school. It was Goethe's *Faust*. I didn't tackle the second part—it was too difficult a task for me, particularly since I'm very busy and have no time to read as much as I would wish. Of course, you know the book very well. It is the story of a great scholar, who, having learned all there was to know, realized that with all his vast knowledge he knew very little about the life of his fellow-men, and that he must mingle with people and live their life. The principal idea of the book is contained in the second part which was too much for me." The professor smiled. "But the main thing is that the scholar finally came to the conclusion after much thought and reflection that the meaning of life consists in serving one's people and, of course, mankind in general. Don't you

agree that this idea might be applied to yourself as well? I don't claim to have understood everything in the book, but I believe I have grasped its main idea, in fact, I am sure of it."

"Yes, you have," Sebastian said quietly.

At that moment Lubentsov looked up and saw a girl in a white dress standing in the doorway—evidently the girl he had seen on the balcony. Lubentsov rose. Sebastian got up too.

"Allow me to introduce you. This is my daughter, Erika."

Lubentsov bowed.

She nodded coldly and sat down on the arm of her father's chair. Her eyes had a guarded, almost unfriendly look.

"Please think it over," said Lubentsov to the professor.

"Very well," replied Sebastian, "I shall think it over. I may say that you are right in many respects and that most probably I shall accept your offer."

Lubentsov flushed with pleasure.

"In that case I shall come and see you again tomorrow, if you don't mind," he said.

"Come, by all means. I have enjoyed talking to you."

At this point the professor's daughter intervened. Looking straight at Lubentsov with an angry look in her large eyes, she said:

"Yesterday two Russian soldiers came here. They were intoxicated. We had difficulty in getting rid of them and it was only when I told them that the Soviet commandant lived here that they finally went away."

"I hope they did not do any damage," Lubentsov said in some embarrassment.

"Nothing to speak of," Sebastian murmured.

"They took our car," said Erika.

"Your car! That's terrible!" cried Lubentsov. He shook

his head with something like despair. "It shall be returned to you at once. I promise you. What sort of a car was it, what make? Ksenia, please make a note of the particulars."

"Besides taking the car," Erika Sebastian went on in an even, vicious tone, "they pestered me with their attentions."

Lubentsov blushed to the roots of his hair.

"To be frank, Herr Oberstleutnant," the professor said, stroking his daughter's shoulder placatingly, "your soldiers are very nice fellows, kind-hearted and well-behaved as a rule. I have observed them a great deal during my walks. But your drunken soldiers are terrible. Excuse me for being so outspoken...."

Lubentsov managed to laugh. Yes, he did not care for the professor's outspokenness. But he forced himself to say:

"Not at all, you're quite right." Then after a brief pause he added, "All drunks are disgusting. I would say that a tipsy Russian soldier is almost as bad as a sober German security man."

"That's true!" exclaimed Sebastian, relieved to be able to agree with the commandant without dissimulating. "That is very true. There is nothing more disgusting than a sober German security man performing what he calls his duty. He is methodical in his cruelty. A calculating cutthroat, he checks his conscience at regimental headquarters for the duration to reclaim it along with his other civilian paraphernalia later on. Yes, Herr Oberstleutnant, it is not surprising that our soldier has made a name for himself in that respect. Our rulers, big and small, did their best to make mercenaries of our fighting men. There is no unjust cause for which the German mercenary will not fight. He defended the rights of the British crown in America, he fought on the side of the Swedish Protestants against

the emperor, he defended the emperor against the Swedish Protestants, the Huguenots against the French king and the French king against the Huguenots."

"In the last war," said Lubentsov, "he defended the interests of the German capitalists and landowners against all peoples and against the German people as well."

"Perhaps. But that question is not yet altogether clear to me."

They parted much pleased with each other.

3

"A Mercedes-Benz, six-cylinder, blue, tourist model, engine number so-and-so, chassis number so-and-so, black leather upholstery."

Lubentsov turned over these particulars to Vorobeitsev with instructions to institute an immediate search, and ordered his own car. But Vorobeitsev shook his head.

"Tishchenko has gone off on leave, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel."

A local driver had to be found. Voronin undertook to do it. He went outside and almost the first person he met was Kranz. He was standing as usual beside a lamp-post near the commandant's office. Slipping a tin of meat into the old man's pocket, Voronin said:

"Wanted: a driver. Urgently."

Kranz thought for a moment or two, then said, "All right, come with me."

They set off down the street.

"Are you married?" Voronin asked him.

"Me? No. I'm a ... I've forgotten the word. My wife is dead."

"A widower."

"That's it. A widower!" Then after a pause he added, "My wife was Russian."

"Was she?"

"Yes. Her name was Elisabeth. Yelizaveta Nikolayevna. Russian women are the best in the world."

"You bet," Voronin agreed warmly.

"She died," Kranz said. His face looked sad. "I have not been happy since. We should never have left Russia. She couldn't stand it here. She wanted to go back to her own country." He fell silent for a while, then he asked, "May I ask you a question, Herr Feldwebel?"

"Fire away."

"Is it true that the landowners are going to be liquidated?"

"Liquidated? Nobody's going to be liquidated. The land will be taken away from them and distributed among the peasants. The peasants will be glad. That's what they want."

"No, it isn't," said Kranz.

"How's that?"

"Perhaps they want it, but they're afraid. They have fear."

"Afraid? Don't they know there's nothing to fear? What are they afraid of?"

"The revenge of the landowners. Revenge, you understand?"

"Are the landowners threatening them?"

"Yes," said Kranz.

Voronin whistled and shook his head.

They walked on in silence. At last Kranz stopped at a shabby four-storey house in a street bordered with lime-trees. They climbed to the second floor and Kranz knocked at a door. A light was switched on and the door opened. Before them stood a young man in pyjamas with a bald head and a round, flat face. He looked at

Voronin, Voronin looked at him and astonishment on both their faces gave way to smiles.

"Wait a minute!" cried Voronin. "Where have I seen you before?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the man in the pyjamas, and suddenly burst out in Russian: "Across the river. Across the Oder! One, two, three—done!"

It was an acquaintance of Sergeant-Major Voronin, Fritz Armut, former staff Feldwebel of the German army, recently returned from a Russian POW camp. Voronin with a detail of scouts had kidnapped him from a German advance post the previous April. It all seemed such ancient history now! Armut ran ahead of Voronin opening doors for him as excited and happy as if he had met a long-lost brother. He introduced him to his wife and children, switching from German to Russian and back to German again.

After Voronin had pulled him out of the war by the scruff of his neck, Armut had been sent to a Soviet camp for war prisoners in the Ukraine where they had been employed in felling timber. They had been treated well, and the conditions had been tolerable, he said. Some time later he had fallen ill and with a group of other sick and ailing prisoners had been sent back to Germany. When he had related all this to Voronin, Armut turned to his wife and began to tell her—in German this time—how cleverly this Feldwebel and his fellow-scouts had nabbed him under the very nose of the German army at the very moment when Reichsminister von Ribbentrop had been visiting their division. In telling the story Armut kept repeating a queer Russian expression he had picked up in the Ukraine, "*Ekh, yolki palki*!" and Voronin grinned broadly each time he heard the words uttered in Armut's comical German accent.

"*Ekh, yolki-palki, karashaw*!"

Armut hurriedly began to lay the table.

"*No zakuska,*" he apologized. "No vodka. Only a drop of spirits, *yolki-palki*!"

But Voronin declined—the driver was needed urgently and they went off at once to the commandant's office.

"I've brought you an old friend, a war-time pal," said Voronin, as he threw open the door to the commandant's private office.

The sight of Armut at once brought back to Lubentsov too the memory of that bold and skilful sally across the Oder for which he had been awarded the Alexander Nevsky Order.

When Armut had gone to see about the car, Voronin related to Lubentsov what "one old German" had told him about the landowners intimidating the peasants.

"That's just gossip!" Lubentsov said angrily. "How can they intimidate anyone? Besides, if it were true, I would have heard about it long ago. You're getting a bit too pally with the Germans. I didn't think you knew German well enough for that."

"This particular German," said Voronin, reddening slightly, "speaks Russian. It was Kranz."

"Kranz again! How many times have I told you not to have any dealings with that English aristocrat's lackey. You may go, Comrade Sergeant."

Two days later Lubentsov bitterly regretted his hasty dismissal of the matter. Kranz' information was confirmed. A man from the West had turned up one night in the village of Finkendorf with a letter to the peasants from Richard von Born, a local landowner who had fled on the eve of the arrival of the Soviet forces. Von Born was one of the richest landed proprietors in the province. Under Hitler he had been connected through family ties and acquaintances with leading members of the nazi party, although he himself had not occupied any official post. His son, however, had been chief of staff of an SS

tank division and there were a good many other von Borns in the Wehrmacht.

In his letter von Born had warned that anyone who dared to make use of his land and property would be prosecuted. He informed his peasants that within a year and a half the Russians would leave the area in accordance with a secret agreement among the "Big Three" and then he would take legal proceedings against those peasants who made free with his property and they would be tried as common thieves.

The peasants had been greatly impressed by that letter.

Although the Finkendorf community had been one of the initiators of the land reform—only ten days earlier a mass meeting of the peasants had passed a resolution on this question—now even the most active members of the community and the local council had stopped talking about the proposed reform as if the matter had never been raised. The very words "land reform" were now taboo.

On learning of this Lubentsov drove out at once to Finkendorf. He parked the car outside the inn. Through the dimly-lighted windows he could see that the place was full. He and Ksenia went inside. People were sitting around the tables, playing dominoes and cards with mugs of beer at their elbows. Lubentsov at once spotted bürgermeister Langheinrich sitting in a corner. Langheinrich seemed rather taken aback to see the commandant. Two seats were vacated at once at his table and Lubentsov and his interpreter sat down. Langheinrich ordered two mugs of beer. The hubbub of conversation in the parlour subsided at once, and the only sound was the clicking of the dominoes on the boards.

"Well, how are things?" asked Lubentsov. "You're a bit slow with deliveries, aren't you? I expected more of you, Langheinrich, than of most other bürgermeisters.

After all, you're a member of the Communist Party, an anti-fascist of long standing."

"The deliveries will be carried out, Herr Oberstleutnant," said Langheinrich, and added with a slight smile, "You are always in such a hurry, Herr Oberstleutnant. Farmers are slow folk, you know."

"That is so," agreed Lubentsov, smiling in his turn.

"Are you staying the night here or are you going further?" Langheinrich inquired.

"I think we'll stay here tonight. Can you put us up?"

"Certainly."

Langheinrich got up, and, telling the proprietor to charge the drinks to him, went out with his guests. Some five or six peasants were standing beside the car listening to Fritz Armut who was talking to them in a loud, excited voice. On seeing Lubentsov, he broke off and the peasants moved away.

"We'll walk up," Lubentsov said to Ksenia. "Tell him to drive to the bürgermeister's house." The car drove off.

"Now then," said Lubentsov, turning to Langheinrich who was walking slowly beside him. "What about this letter you have received? I might have expected to hear about it from you, Langheinrich, instead of from other sources. That's no good. No good at all. It is the bürgermeister's duty to inform the commandant of such things."

Langheinrich scratched the back of his head.

"Our people are such cowards, Herr Oberstleutnant. They're scared of their own shadow."

"But what's the good of the bürgermeister, and a Communist at that, if he doesn't explain things to the peasants? At least you could have let me know in good time." He made a gesture of disgust.

"You see," Langheinrich began in an attempt to justify himself, but Lubentsov would not listen.

"Have you a telephone in your house?" he asked. "You haven't? Then let's go to your office."

They entered the dark building of the little town hall. Ksenia connected Lubentsov with Lauterburg. Chokhov, who was on duty, answered the phone.

"Anything new?" Lubentsov asked him. "Have they found Sebastian's car?"

"Not yet, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," replied Chokhov. "Nothing to report in the office and area under your jurisdiction."

Lubentsov smiled and hung up.

They left the town hall and walked on towards the von Born mansion.

"Perhaps you'd like to spend the night here?" Langheinrich said. "Plenty of room, very comfortable."

"Do you mean to say it's still standing empty?" cried Lubentsov. "How's that? Look here, Langheinrich, you are beginning to make me angry. Didn't we agree last week that the refugees were to be moved in here? No, no, I refuse to listen to any excuses. Why aren't they here?"

Langheinrich said nothing.

"You say the people are cowards. 'Like pastor, like flock,' you know. You're afraid of Richard von Born, Langheinrich. You were afraid of Hitler too. And now it's von Born. You're afraid of everybody except me. And that's where you're making a mistake."

"Do you want me to translate that?" Ksenia asked doubtfully.

"Of course, and as accurately as you can. Kindly don't try to tell me what to say and what not to say, Comrade Spiridonova."

"I'm not afraid," said Langheinrich firmly. "But I know the mood of the peasants, and...."

"You are not doing anything to counteract that mood!"

They reached Langheinrich's house in a gloomy frame of mind and retired almost at once.

Lubentsov tossed restlessly on his hard, narrow bed for a long time. "Getting used to a soft life," he reproached

himself. "A plain peasant bed doesn't suit you any more." And he told himself that in future he would make a point of spending the night exclusively in workers' or peasants' homes while travelling, and the poorer the home the better. Occupation armies rarely learned much about a country because as a rule they were billeted in the homes of the well-to-do. This gave them a false picture of the actual conditions in the country. They were led to believe that the whole country consisted of luxurious houses and soft beds and that the staple diet of the population was pork and wine. That sort of an attitude would not do for the Soviet occupation authorities. Sleep, for goodness sake, sleep, he told himself, turning from side to side. If you want to understand what the poor peasant wants, what he needs, you must live as he does.

But, he thought suddenly, there are plenty of poor peasants in this very village who don't know what they want themselves. Or perhaps they know, but they're afraid to want. The past has fettered them and won't let them go forward.

Langheinrich was not sleeping either. Long after he had gone to bed Lubentsov heard him shuffling about and sighing heavily. Now and again he heard the click of his lighter. Lubentsov was well aware of the difficulties of the bürgermeister's position, caught as he was between the commandant and the pressure of small town opinion which he could not afford to disregard.

He fell asleep at last, but soon woke up and looked at his watch. It was five o'clock—just the time to rise in the country. He got up and dressed quickly. The door opened and Langheinrich came in, also fully dressed, bringing a basin of water for Lubentsov. Lubentsov washed and went into the next room with his host. Marta Langheinrich, the bürgermeister's wife, was laying the table deftly and noiselessly. There was a smell of fresh baking. Before long Ksenia came in and they sat down to break-

fast in silence. In the grey light of dawn no one wanted to talk or argue, although there was plenty to talk about.

"Well," said Lubentsov, forcing himself to break the silence, "what do you intend doing today?"

"Move the refugees into the manor house," Langheinrich said. "I'll do it if it kills me."

He spoke gloomily but firmly. Lubentsov brightened.

"That will be the best answer to Herr von Born," he said. "And a very eloquent one too. Hold a meeting this evening when the peasants come home from the fields. It is best to be frank with them. No need to beat about the bush. Shall I send you a speaker or will you manage yourselves?"

"We'll manage ourselves," Langheinrich grunted.

Marta searched her husband's face. At his last words she shook her head.

"It would be better if someone else came," she said.

"As you wish," said Lubentsov, narrowing his eyes. "What do you say, Langheinrich?"

"We'll manage," the bürgermeister repeated.

They got up and went outside. Marta saw them to the door. Langheinrich went ahead with Ksenia, but Lubentsov lingered behind, and, pressing Marta's hand, he said to her in German, "Don't worry."

She smiled wanly in reply.

The village was coming to life. Peasants, men and women, were going about their daily tasks. Lubentsov caught up with Langheinrich and Ksenia. The car was waiting for them at the town hall, Armut at the wheel. Gradually the sky grew lighter. A golden flame burned in the east.

4

They drove on. Ksenia was silent as usual. On the whole, unlike Albina, she sought to efface herself as much as possible. As an interpreter she lacked the fluency and quick intelligence of Albina who could sometimes even anticipate what Lubentsov wanted to say, and she frequently fumbled for words. But she was extremely conscientious and accurate. Yet when occasionally Lubentsov asked her opinion about something or sought to determine whether she approved of something he had done, she would promptly avoid the issue by saying frankly:

"I don't understand such things." Or: "You know best."

At first this attitude of hers irritated Lubentsov, but after a while he got used to the silent reserve of the new interpreter. He even felt a certain timidity in her presence—he was always conscious that she was judging his actions by some standards of her own. Her large and rather solemn grey eyes always had a somewhat appraising look.

"Do you think Langheinrich will see the thing through?" Lubentsov asked her as they drove along. "Or do you think he'll get cold feet?"

"It's hard to say," she replied. "You know him better than I do. I only met him yesterday."

Since this was strictly true, Lubentsov could find no fault with her reply.

"You're right as usual," he laughed and dropped the subject.

At the next stop he asked Ksenia to telephone to Finkendorf and inquire whether Langheinrich had begun moving the refugees into the manor house. Langheinrich replied that the moving would begin in an hour's time and that the refugees had been told to get ready. True, not all of them agreed to move.

"Someone's been frightening them too?" Lubentsov was angry. "Tell him I shall stop in there on my way back and check up for myself."

Langheinrich made no comment on this, but asked Ksenia to tell the Herr Kommandant that his office had been looking for him.

Ksenia dialled the office and got Kasatkin who fairly roared at her when he recognized her voice, "Where's the lieutenant-colonel? Tell him to come back to Lauterburg at once. There's urgent business that requires his immediate attention."

"What could have happened there?" Lubentsov wondered, but since such matters were not discussed over the telephone he told Ksenia to say that he would be leaving in an hour.

The village they were telephoning from was the one in which Lubentsov and Voronin had spent the night in the manor house of Liselotte von Melchior on their way to Lauterburg.

He smiled as he recalled how outspoken she had been that time when she had thought that he did not understand German. She had been afraid that her uninvited guests—the commandant and the soldiers accompanying him—would help themselves to some of her valuables. Now the whole house and the land that went with it, some six hundred hectares, were going to be taken from her. And if at the time he had not taken offence at her insulting words, now he recalled them with sudden contempt. She had suspected him of being mercenary, had believed him capable of robbing her of some of her trifling possessions. No, he was not mercenary. He would take everything she had, but not for himself; he wanted nothing of hers.

Lubentsov stopped the car in the middle of the village beside the pond shaded by trees and got out. The first person he saw was the big red-headed refugee who had

beaten his little daughter on this very spot. The man also recognized him and looked away in confusion. Lubentsov went up to him, greeted him and asked him his name. The German said his name was Hans Klappenberg.

"How is your little girl?" Lubentsov asked, his face impassive.

"Very well," Klappenberg replied, turning red.

"Have you been given living quarters?"

Klappenberg spread out his big, coarse hands.

"We're living in a shed," he said.

"Farm-hand, I suppose?"

"Yes!"

"Hm. So you're living in a shed? What will you do in winter?"

Klappenberg gave the commandant a puzzled look and said uncertainly, "They say there's going to be a land reform."

"So they say," Lubentsov agreed with a twinkle.

Some people were coming towards him. Lubentsov recognized the local bürgermeister and a few peasants and farm labourers he had met before. He exchanged greetings with them and smiled to a pleasant-looking young man named Helmut Reinicke, a farm labourer and one of the leading spirits of the village, who had joined the Communist Party recently. Lubentsov had taken an instant liking to this lad with the fair hair, red cheeks, and the shy, boyish manner.

"We'll get you decent living quarters, don't worry," Lubentsov said to Klappenberg. "You can tell your wife and daughter. Perhaps they remember me, too?"

"Yes," said Klappenberg.

Lubentsov turned to the bürgermeister and asked how the harvest and deliveries were progressing.

The bürgermeister, his name was Weller, a thin, sharp-faced man in glasses who looked like anything but a peasant, outlined the situation briefly for Lubentsov.

Now and again Reinicke interposed a sentence or two. They walked slowly along the edge of the pond, Lubentsov jotting down some of the information Weller gave him and murmuring, "Yes, yes. I see."

Looking up from his notebook he noticed that the peasants were all staring at someone coming down the street towards them. It was Liselotte von Melchior. Her tall, graceful figure moved swiftly, and the long shawl she had thrown over her shoulder fluttered in the breeze.

She came up quickly, her face a mask of misery and despair. She looked as if she were rushing to her doom.

"I must speak to you," she said to Lubentsov.

"At your service," he replied.

"Privately."

The peasants moved away.

Liselotte von Melchior threw a swift, hostile glance at Ksenia.

"We can manage without an interpreter, I believe," she said brusquely.

Ksenia translated this word for word, her face totally expressionless.

"I know quite well that you speak German and everyone else knows it," the woman went on. "I would kindly ask you to give me a few minutes of your attention in private."

"Tell her," said Lubentsov, "that she is mistaken. I understand German well enough but I cannot speak it. If she wishes to hear my answer she must reconcile herself to the presence of the interpreter."

When Ksenia translated this to her, the lady of the manor was silent for a moment, then she said:

"Very well. Please tell the commandant that I am aware that the Soviet Military Administration intends to carry out a so-called land reform. Don't try to deny it because I know it is true. But are you aware that my late husband, Colonel von Melchior, was shot as an anti-nazi?"

"Yes, I know he was involved in the military conspiracy against Hitler."

"I would ask you to bring this fact to the attention of your superiors."

"Very well."

"Please realize that by confiscating the property of an enemy of the Hitler regime you cannot add to the popularity of the Soviet Administration in this country."

"I'm afraid you do not realize, Frau von Melchior, that it is not the Administration that is the initiator of the land reform, it is the peasants themselves, the landless and the poor who are longing for a plot of land of their own."

"The peasants are always eager to make use of other people's property. But you, as a representative of the occupation authorities, cannot encourage inclinations that can only lead to chaos and anarchy."

"On the contrary, we support this legitimate desire of the peasants inasmuch as it fully accords with the agreements reached at the Potsdam Conference on the democratization of Germany. Turning over the land to the peasants is an important stage in the process of democratization."

"Your reference to the Potsdam Conference is irrelevant. Your allies are not introducing any reforms in their zones. I happen to know from a letter I received from my sister in Bavaria the other day that nothing of the kind is taking place there.... Perhaps the peasants there too would like to take possession of what doesn't belong to them, but they are not permitted to do so."

"I cannot tell you anything on that score. Personally I hope that there will be a reform there as well."

By now they had reached the car, and the lady of the manor, suddenly overcome with weakness, leaned against the mudguard, staring into space. Tears started from her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said. "The most disgusting thing about a woman is her weakness."

Lubentsov could not agree with her—at that moment she seemed very beautiful.

"I don't blame you personally," she said. "You are only an instrument of blind force, a small part of a huge machine. I quite believe you do not wish to harm anyone, even if they happen to be estate-owners."

Lubentsov's face darkened.

"You are right," he said. "I am indeed a very small, insignificant particle of something very big, but I am a thinking particle. And if you wish to know my personal feelings on that score, I may say that I would like everybody to be happy, even ordinary farm-hands."

She said good-bye, and went slowly back up the road. Lubentsov and Ksenia got into the car and set out for Lauterburg.

After driving for some time in silence, Lubentsov said:

"I noticed you didn't know how to translate the word 'longing'."

"I have never heard it in German."

"The word is *Sehnsucht.*"

"I didn't know that word."

"You ought to read more. Do you read German books?"

"No."

"Well, you ought to. German poetry, for instance, is full of *Sehnsuchts.* Don't think I am dissatisfied with your work. On the whole you do your job quite well. But your vocabulary could be enlarged. You ought to read more."

"Very well."

5

Lubentsov found all the officers assembled in Kasatkin's office.

"What's been happening here?" he demanded, sitting down without removing his cap or raincoat.

Kasatkin in great agitation reported that the previous evening two members of the central board of the Christian-Democratic Union in the Soviet zone, Dr. Schneider and Dr. Schörner, had arrived from Berlin. They had addressed a meeting attended by over seven hundred people at which they had opposed the land reform on the grounds that it would ruin agriculture. The Communists and Social-Democrats had evidently been taken by surprise. At any rate no one had given the German politicians a rebuff. The whole town was in an uproar. People were beginning to come out openly against land reform. Grellmann was being particularly active in this respect. Although he had behaved cautiously at the meeting it was quite clear that he was one of the most violent opponents of reform.

"General Kuprianov will give us hell for this," said Lubentsov. "Have you told him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He called me down properly," Kasatkin's face lengthened at the memory. "He said if you had been here nothing like that would have happened."

Lubentsov threw a sympathetic glance at his assistant.

"The general is mistaken," he said. "I was lucky to have been away when it happened. What could I have done? The leaders of one of the democratic parties arrive and wish to address a meeting. What objection could there be to that? No, I don't blame you in the least. Now you, Comrade Yavorsky, are far more to blame."

"Yes, I know," said Yavorsky. "It's my mistake, of course. I didn't even know they were here."

"That's bad. You ought to be informed of all political happenings."

"Today they had the audacity to ask for permission to hold another meeting. At the electric motor works this time."

"What did you say?"

"We refused them of course," Kasatkin answered for Yavorsky.

"Now that is the easiest way out, you know," Lubentsov said. "Yavorsky, have a talk with the comrades from the German Communist Party and the Social-Democratic Party. They have strong organizations at the works. Surely the workers, Communists and Social-Democrats, won't let these two doctors get the better of them?"

He telephoned to Kuprianov and put his views before the general, who after giving some thought to the matter gave his consent.

Presently Schneider and Schörner paid a visit to the commandant's office in person. They were both men of advanced years. Schneider had been a Prussian cabinet minister and a member of the Reichstag before the nazi coup. He was a tall man with a large, bald head, stiffly erect carriage and an aristocratic air about him. Schörner on the other hand was a lively little old man, quick-witted and cunning. He had a huge nose of a most curious shape. It had no bridge and seemed to begin at his parting and sweep all the way down to his chin. His face thus appeared to be all nose, which frowned, spread out in smiles, laughed, chuckled, spoke quickly, snorted and looked scornfully at all the insignificant noses around it.

The two doctors had come to thank the commandant for permitting them to hold a second meeting. Schneider solemnly declared that they were making a tour of the entire Soviet zone with the permission of the Soviet Military Administration. They were clearly much interested in finding out whether the commandant had got in touch with Berlin about the second meeting or whether he had cancelled his deputy's order on his own initiative.

Lubentsov was extremely polite. He told them that he would very much like to hear them speak, but that un-

fortunately he was so busy that he would have to forego the pleasure.

When the interview was over Lubentsov saw them all the way outside and stood waiting on the steps while they got into the car, where Grellmann was sitting. It was a large open Mercedes. Schneider's bald head gleamed in the sun. He stood in the car beside the driver, holding on to the windshield with one hand, and waving to Lubentsov with the other. Lubentsov recalled that this was the pose adopted by Hitler when touring German towns.

As the car moved off, Schneider put on his hat and sat down. Schörner on the back seat did exactly the same.

Lubentsov laughed and went back to his office. His good humour further improved when Yavorsky informed him that Professor Sebastian had consented the evening before to accept the post of Landrat.

This intelligence reminded Lubentsov of the professor's missing car and he summoned Vorobeitsev.

Vorobeitsev entered the room and stopped near the door where he remained throughout the conversation, afraid to come nearer because he had been drinking that morning and knew that his breath would give him away.

"What about that car of Sebastian's?" Lubentsov inquired, unaware of Vorobeitsev's tribulations. "This is very important, you know I entrusted it to you because I consider you an efficient worker. But you haven't produced any results yet."

"I'm doing all I can," replied Vorobeitsev. "I've made the rounds of all the army units in the vicinity of the town. I have all the unit commanders alerted."

"Have you got in touch with the German police? Well, you should. Chief of police Jost is a good man. You may find that the car is standing in some back-yard here or in some private garage. In which case the police can trace it more easily than you."

"I'll see Jost at once."

Vorobeitsev left Lubentsov's office seized by a sudden wave of resentment against the commandant. Lubentsov was right again: he ought to have gone straight to the police, and he cursed himself for not having done so. Moreover, he was jealous of Chokhov's admiration for Lubentsov. And last but not least, his resentment against Lubentsov was the more bitter for having no outlet, for however much he tried, he could not find anything in Lubentsov's behaviour to give him cause for contempt or ridicule. Damn the man! How anyone could be so completely absorbed in his work, and yet manage to remain his natural self was beyond Vorobeitsev's comprehension.

He went straight from Lubentsov's office to the police station and notified Jost of the commandant's orders to institute a search for the car belonging to the new Landrat.

Jost's appointment as chief of police had caused no little trouble since Lerche had categorically opposed the nomination of a Social-Democrat to the post. Lerche's old and understandable distaste for opportunists like Scheidemann, Noske, Müller and Wels extended to all Social-Democrats without exception. The appointment of a Social-Democrat to any post invariably met with his violent opposition.

The mutual distrust of the two workers' parties in Lauterburg often gave rise to unnecessary friction and it needed a great deal of patience and tact to smooth over the conflicts and mollify the hot-tempered Lerche. "Better an enemy than a traitor," Lerche was fond of saying in response to the gentle rebukes of Lubentsov and Yavorsky or the protests of his fellow-Communists, especially Vorländer.

Lerche was a forthright man of great honesty and integrity. Moreover, he was indefatigable. He seemed to be everywhere, and he tried to be everywhere for he did not trust anybody. Not a day passed without his address-

ing two or three meetings. He spoke with fervour, but his arguments were based on parallels drawn from bygone days, prior to 1933, and he spoke of these days with something akin to prophetical zeal, although he was speaking of the past, not the future. All these reminiscences were undoubtedly useful for the German youth to whom that period seemed ancient history, but the trouble was that Lerche himself lived exclusively in that past.

He believed it was a mistake on the part of the Soviet Military Administration to permit the Social-Democratic Party to function at all in the Soviet zone. He bitterly resented the objective approach of the Lauterburg commandant to the two parties, and each new appointment of a Social-Democrat to any position of authority caused him the deepest distress.

6

To look for a lost car even in a small town is much the same as looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. In the first place no one knew whether the car was actually in the town or not. And even if it were, to find it among all the ruins, back-yards, garages, sheds, nooks and crannies was no easy task.

However, the commandant's orders had to be carried out. Jost instructed his policemen to make a thorough search of all back-yards, and himself went off with Vorobeitsev to do some sleuthing of their own. They drove from one yard to another, opening gates and doors of innumerable structures, and, if the doors were locked, the owners were summoned from their flats to open them. Vorobeitsev and Jost inspected hundreds of back-yards in the course of a day. They saw hundreds of cars of all makes—Opels, Mercedeses, BMWs, Wanderers and Maybachs—many of them standing on wooden blocks minus tyres.

Vorobeitsev had no hope of finding the professor's car, but he continued the search nevertheless. He rather enjoyed entering people's back-yards and all but forcing his way into people's apartments, bandying words with young German housewives and slapping elderly Germans patronizingly on the back. Moreover, he now knew where he could lay his hands on a car in case of necessity. To be able to produce a luxurious automobile at a moment's notice for one's chief was, Vorobeitsev believed, one of the ways a man could earn gratitude and a benevolent attitude in high quarters which might come in handy some day.

In the back-yard of a large shabby house on Moltkestrasse a young girl came out to them with the keys of several garages. She was a tall, sprightly young woman with fluffy blonde hair and a figure rather too mature for her age. Vorobeitsev could not take his eyes off her plump white arms. While Jost looked over the garage Vorobeitsev chatted with the girl, whose name was Inga. Vorobeitsev already spoke some German—at any rate his vocabulary of about one hundred and fifty words was quite sufficient for his purposes, especially since his conversation was limited to purely practical matters.

They followed Jost into a garage and there, among a dozen cars of diverse makes, stood Professor Sebastian's Mercedes.

Jost with a cry of joy ran up to it with his flash-light, checking the numbers again and again. He asked Inga how it happened to be there. She said that two Russian soldiers had driven it in and asked her to take care of it, warning her on no account to let anyone have it because it was the property of the GPU.

"That's a good one!" laughed Vorobeitsev.

Nevertheless, when Jost started the engine and drove the car out of the garage into the yard Inga protested and with tears in her eyes begged them to put it back, declar-

ing that she was afraid of what the two soldiers would do to her when they found the car gone.

"You silly girl," said Vorobeitsev, laughing and stroking her plump arm. "You needn't worry about those two. We'll take care of them. As soon as we deliver the car I'll come back and wait for them. Nab them on the spot. Say, do you live alone here? With relatives? Hm.... Well, don't let those two go if they get here before me."

With these words Vorobeitsev slid in behind the wheel and drove out of the yard. Jost got into his own car. He intended going with Vorobeitsev to turn over the car to Sebastian, but Vorobeitsev said he would do it himself; he wanted Lubentsov to think it was he who had found the missing car.

Pulling up outside the professor's house, Vorobeitsev blew the horn several times so loudly that several people poked their heads out of the windows of the old houses in the vicinity to see what was happening. An old woman wearing a white cap came out, peered through the fence, clasped her hands with joy and hurried to open the gates. Vorobeitsev drove up past the house to the little brick garage at the back. Here he stopped, got out of the car and shouted:

"Hey there! Come and get your car!"

The girl who appeared at his call was so pretty and her slim brown arms were so shapely that Vorobeitsev instantly forgot all about the buxom Inga. Correctly assuming that this was the professor's daughter, he respectfully clicked his heels and saluted.

"Ah, Herr Lubentsov has found our car?" she said.

Vorobeitsev smiled sourly at this. "Why Herr Lubentsov? I found it."

"Thank you," she said and proceeded to inspect the car carefully, opening the doors and looking inside. She did this in such a cool, business-like fashion and her gratitude was so restrained that Vorobeitsev felt quite hurt. He

had expected the return of the car to evoke an outburst of emotion. Adopting an official tone, he inquired whether everything was in order.

"Yes, everything is in order," said the girl. Since he seemed in no hurry to go, but stood there smoking calmly and surveying the garden, she invited him in. He followed her upstairs to the little drawing-room. She asked him to sit down. Vorobeitsev felt a little out of his depth. He made her a few compliments which she received with total indifference. Her blue-grey eyes regarded him coldly.

"I am sorry I have nothing much to offer you," she said. "But I daresay you know our difficulties."

"That's strange," he said. "The commandant lives here. He could, if he wished.... I am only his assistant, but my landlord has no reason to complain about me."

He could not express himself quite clearly in German, and she smiled faintly at his use of nouns without declensions and his exclusive preference for infinitives. When he saw her smile he laughed.

"Are you a Communist?" she asked him suddenly.

"No," he replied, taken by surprise.

She looked at him with doubt in her eyes.

"Honestly, I to be not," he assured her in his broken German. "In Soviet Union all the same Communist, not Communist. Soviet Union all to have equal rights."

She asked whether it was true that only Communists were permitted to study in higher schools in the Soviet Union. He did not understand the question at first and when he did he laughed loudly and said in Russian: "Rubbish!" and translated into German: "*Dumm.*"

His laughter and gestures were sincere enough to convince Erika Sebastian that he was telling the truth.

At that point the professor himself came in. He thanked Vorobeitsev warmly for having found the car, and soon after, Vorobeitsev, having received an invitation to visit the Sebastians whenever he wished, took his leave.

Dusk was gathering over the town. Lights twinkled in the windows of the houses. Only the commandant's office was dark for some reason. Vorobeitsev hurried past the sentry and mounted the stairs. He found everybody in the reception-room. Lubentsov was sitting on the couch in his cap and raincoat, as if he had not taken them off since he had come back to town. The other officers were sitting or standing about, some pacing up and down the room.

Vorobeitsev reported to Lubentsov about the car.

"Good," said Lubentsov absently. "Sit down."

Vorobeitsev sat down still trying to guess at the reason for the strained atmosphere. No one bothered to switch on the lights. Yavorsky paced up and down. After a while from the remarks exchanged between Lubentsov, Kasatkin and Yavorsky, Vorobeitsev gathered that they were awaiting the results of the meeting at the electric motor works; it was to be a test of the maturity of the two Socialist labour parties, their ability to counteract the demagogy of the bourgeois politicians with their own democratic policy, the policy on which the future of Germany depended.

Vorobeitsev sat down beside Chokhov. Chokhov, like Vorobeitsev to some extent, could not understand why Lubentsov was so worried. It was force that decided such matters, not meetings and oratory. Hence it surprised him to see Lubentsov, a light smoker, now smoking one cigarette after another; he was equally surprised and amused when General Kuprianov telephoned at least three times to inquire how the meeting was progressing, which showed that he was no less worried than Lubentsov.

Vorobeitsev shrugged his shoulders.

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," he said, "in my opinion one of us ought to be present at that meeting. It will do them good to see we are keeping an eye on them."

Lubentsov turned to Vorobeitsev. "We have already discussed the matter and decided it best not to go there," he said quietly.

"I still think," Menshov interposed from the far end of the room where he stood with his hands behind his back, leaning against the wall, "we might drop the niceties in this case. There is too much at stake."

"My dear chap," said Kasatkin, stopping in the middle of the room, "that is precisely why we have decided to take this course. Comrade Lubentsov has already stated our point of view. The Germans are sufficiently interested in the reform to be able to defend it from attack. After all, you mustn't forget that this is a matter that concerns the Germans alone. It is simple enough to issue orders. And afterwards they will have a chance to say: it wasn't our idea, we were ordered to do it...."

The telephone rang. Yavorsky grabbed the receiver.

"Good," he exclaimed in German. "I see. Very good."

He hung up. "Schneider finished speaking amid complete silence from the audience. No applause."

Lubentsov lit another cigarette.

"They'll make it hot for them," said Chegodayev, and he laughed. "Workers are always workers, even if they're Germans. I am sure everything will be all right there. I know that factory. There are some fine people there."

"Possibly, possibly," said Menshov, seating himself on the edge of the table. "But God helps those who help themselves, as they say."

"Aren't we helping all we can?" said Yavorsky, wiping his glasses. "We're not just twiddling our thumbs, are we? That saying applies to them, not to us: the commandant's office helps those who help themselves."

"They weren't so particular in their methods when they were in our country," remarked Vorobeitsev.

"How can you compare us with them!" cried Chegodayev, banging his large fist on his knee.

"Oh, all right, all right," Vorobeitsev said placatingly, and, dismissing the whole thing with a wave of his hand, he turned to Chokhov.

Both the words and the gesture plainly implied the thought behind them, namely: "We're all the same." And that indeed was what Vorobeitsev believed. Questions of principle did not concern him, not because he believed that all men are brothers, but because he was of the opinion that all men are swine. However that may be, he turned away, thereby demonstrating his complete lack of interest in the talk around him, and proceeded to think of Erika Sebastian and her slender girlish arms. Then he remembered Inga, and it suddenly occurred to him that those two law-breakers still had to be apprehended. As a matter of fact, he was looking for an excuse to leave the commandant's office because he cared nothing at all for this meeting at the factory, at any rate he did not attach as much importance to it as the others seemed to.

He got up again and told the commandant that he thought he ought to go to the garage where the stolen car had been found to detain the culprits.

Lubentsov gave him permission to go. Vorobeitsev, wishing his friend to share a pleasant evening with him, said:

"I shan't manage alone. There are two of them."

"Take a soldier with you," said Lubentsov absently.

"Perhaps Captain Chokhov could come along?"

"Very well," said Lubentsov. "Go ahead."

Vorobeitsev and Chokhov left the office.

7

"You've been neglecting me lately," said Vorobeitsev when they were outside. "You haven't been to see me once. Can't seem to get enough of that Lubentsov of

yours. Don't tell me you like being with him. He talks of nothing but land reforms, food purchases, reparations, dismantling, and the guilt of the German people. Not a man, but a walking newspaper. Where are you staying?"

"At the commandant's office. I share a room with the platoon commander."

"Just like you. Your idea of a cosy home is a barrack. Look here, my place is just round the corner. Let's drop in for a minute."

Vorobeitsev's Lauterburg flat turned out to be far less luxurious than the one in Babelsberg. Vorobeitsev had learned to be more cautious. He now occupied two rooms in a two-storey house. True, the rooms were large, with a wide balcony and a separate entrance. The walls were hung with pictures, the floor thickly carpeted. The previous tenant had been Albina Tereshchenko.

"My landlord owns a bookshop," Vorobeitsev informed his friend. "Incidentally, he's another of Lubentsov's admirers. Says the commandant buys books regularly from him." He spoke with a slight sneer although he knew quite well that he had no grounds for his attitude and that Chokhov was not likely to admire Lubentsov any the less for his passion for reading. But although he was fully conscious of all this and had no particular desire to make fun of Lubentsov, he could not keep the sneer out of his voice whenever he spoke about the commandant. He referred to him airily as "the boss": "the boss has gone off to the country again," or "the boss gave Kasatkin a good dressing down," "the boss is going in for the German classics in a big way," and so on. By using this slightly disrespectful form of address, he unconsciously sought to arouse his own and Chokhov's contempt for Lubentsov, although he could not have said why he did it.

Today, after his visit to Professor Sebastian's house, he decided to start a rumour which he knew to be quite false.

"The boss is a smart chap. He chose good billets all right. The professor's daughter is a perfect peach!"

"That'll do. Let's get going," growled Chokhov.

They walked through the dimly-lighted streets, past blocks of demolished buildings. The order to clear the streets had been carried out and the smooth asphalt and neat pavements looked incongruous against the background of gaping windows, heaps of bricks and debris, and the steel beams sticking up out of the ruins.

Inga was very glad to see Vorobeitsev, for she had been terrified all evening that the "owners" of the car would turn up. She led the way up a dark steep wooden staircase to the attic, which was divided into a large number of tiny rooms like bird cages occupied by a great many people. Inga introduced the Russian officers to her father, a railway worker with a grey moustache. A two-year-old child slept on a trunk in the corner.

"Whose is that?" inquired Vorobeitsev.

"Mine," replied Inga.

Vorobeitsev whistled in surprise. Inga was only seventeen.

"Where's your husband?"

She did not reply.

"What are you cross-examining her for?" said Chokhov. "Can't you learn to mind your own business?"

They sat down at the table. Vorobeitsev, with his usual foresight, had brought a bottle and some food in his dispatch-case. Inga's father clicked his tongue with pleasure.

"It's a long time since we've tasted any of that," he said. "Can't get any. You can buy it, of course, but it's far too dear for the likes of us."

After supper Vorobeitsev got up and beckoned to Inga.

"Let's go and see what's doing. They ought to be here by now."

Inga was obviously reluctant to go with Vorobeitsev.

"They will have to come here for the keys," she said.

Vorobeitsev got angry and insisted, and finally she shrugged her shoulders and went out with him.

Chokhov offered her father a cigarette which he eagerly accepted.

"*Danke, danke, Herr Offizier,*" he repeated as he blew out the smoke with relish.

He clearly enjoyed the cigarette more than the wine and the food. He showed Chokhov his collection of pipes. There were quite a lot of them, of all shapes and sizes. But not a grain of tobacco in any of them. Chokhov wanted to tell this German that they ought to plant tobacco, as the peasants and even some of the townsfolk in Russia had during the war, but he did not know how to say all that in German, and so he sat silent, smoking and thinking his own thoughts. The German, now a little tipsy, began to wax confidential to Chokhov. And although he saw that Chokhov understood very little, he tried to explain his meaning carefully, repeating his sentences several times over. He badly wanted this Russian officer to understand him. He told him that Germans of the older generation like himself had always seen through Hitler, they had felt he was leading Germany astray, and they had hated and despised him. He blamed the youth for letting Hitler fool them and make them his dupes. Inga had been a member of the BDM (Young Women's League), one of the numerous nazi youth organizations. She too had shouted "Heil Hitler" as frenziedly as the others. She and her girl friends had spent the summers in holiday camps. One summer she had come home pregnant. And when her father had condemned her behaviour she had threatened to report him to the authorities, and he had been forced to endure the disgrace in silence. As for Inga she had not considered it a disgrace at all since such behaviour was encouraged in the youth camps and a child born in this manner was called *Kind für den Führer.*

Chokhov understood very little of all this but he nodded his head wisely.

At length Vorobeitsev and Inga returned. The girl looked sullen. Vorobeitsev was in a temper. Interrupting the old man, he said to Chokhov:

"No sense in hanging about here any longer. We'd better be going."

They were just about to go when there was a loud knock at the door and a deep male voice uttered in Russian, "Hey there! Let's have the key!"

Vorobeitsev leapt forward, tore open the door and dragged into the room by the collar a very frightened young sergeant. He was no more than twenty-five—a light-haired lad in a greasy trench cap tipped over his eyes. At the sight of the two officers he blinked rapidly, but noticing the empty bottle standing on the table, he brightened.

"What're you grabbing me for, Comrade Captain," he said in a hurt voice. "I was coming in myself. Gimme the keys," he said to Inga.

"Keys!" sneered Vorobeitsev. "You're coming with us to the commandant's office. You'll get your keys there. The keys to paradise. Just like St. Peter. Ever heard of him?"

"What's the matter? What've I done?" the sergeant continued in the same tone, his eyes on the door. "I'm only carrying out orders."

"Whose orders?" Vorobeitsev taunted, enjoying his joke at the young sergeant's expense. "The chief of the marauders' gang, eh?"

But Chokhov had had enough of this.

"Show us your leave certificate," he said. "We are from the Soviet commandant's office. Straighten your cap. Stand at attention. Where's that certificate?"

The sergeant looked at Chokhov and saw at once that this was serious. At Chokhov's stern commanding tone,

Vorobeitsev himself dropped his jeering tone, straightened his belt and looked grim.

The sergeant of course had no leave certificate. Flight was out of the question. He swallowed hard, and tried to plead with his captors.

"Comrades officers, it isn't my fault.... I was asked to do it. I didn't mean to do anything bad. Sure, we took the car. But they've got heaps of cars. We would have taken a few rides and left it. We just wanted a bit of fun, that's all."

Vorobeitsev could not help thinking that he had acquired his own Opel-Kapitan approximately in the same manner as this soldier had acquired Professor Sebastian's Mercedes; if he, Vorobeitsev, had been detained for that and brought to the commandant's office he would have given exactly the same excuse, for he too considered it a mere trifle, an occupationist prank, an innocent bit of fun, as this sergeant had put it. But in spite of his thoughts, or perhaps because of them, he continued to regard the sergeant with cold hostility, his eyes glowing with self-righteousness and virtue.

As for Chokhov, he felt sincerely sorry for the sergeant, although he himself could never be guilty of such an offence. He was sorry for him because after all the sergeant was a Russian, who had most likely done his duty honestly and selflessly all through the war and who had unwittingly perhaps succumbed to that carefree atmosphere which prevails for a time among the troops of a victorious army stationed in a defeated country. And after all, Chokhov thought, with a feeling of resentment against the Germans, including even the fat, good-natured Inga and her pleasant father, these Germans had grabbed plenty of things in other countries, it would do them no harm to be made to experience if only a hundredth part of what they had inflicted on the Russians, the Poles, the Czechs and the French. And in his heart of hearts Cho-

khov reproached Lubentsov for being partial to the Germans and too harsh with his own people.

Notwithstanding these thoughts, Chokhov would never have dreamed of letting the sergeant go. Chokhov had been sent here by his superior officer to detain a lawbreaker, and detain him he must, even if he had to use force. He put on his cap, nodded to Inga and her father, and went over to the sergeant.

"Let's go," he said.

The sergeant turned obediently and went out.

The three walked in silence through the sleeping town. The sergeant walked along with drooping head. When the commandant's office came into view with the Soviet flag fluttering over the entrance, the sergeant slowed his pace and turned to Chokhov.

"Comrade Captain," he said. He took no notice of Vorobeitsev. "I'm sorry, Comrade Captain."

"All right, that'll do," Vorobeitsev, stung by his having considered Chokhov of more importance than himself, cut him short. "We'll look into it."

Light showed through the chinks in the heavy curtains on the upper floor. The commandant's office was not sleeping.

The three men climbed the stairs and entered the reception office. It was brightly lit, but empty. Loud voices, however, issued from the inner room. Vorobeitsev opened the door slightly and stopped short in surprise: the office was full of people. On the couch—still in his raincoat—sat Lubentsov. There were three officers Vorobeitsev did not know, from Altstadt evidently, and the two neighbouring commandants Leonov and Pigarev. The funny thing was that they were all minus their coats and hats except their "host."

"General Kuprianov on the wire," announced Menshov, handing the receiver to Lubentsov.

"Hullo, Comrade General. Yes, it's all over. You know already? I see you get your information from more than one source." He listened, gave a short laugh and went on, "Well, the keynote of the meeting was that the reaction is raising its head. The workers acquitted themselves very well. I'll send you a detailed report in the morning. At any rate Schneider was a complete flop. He cleared out, leaving his coat behind him in his haste. The workers picked it up on a stick and carried it out after him to his car. Oh no, there was no clash of any kind. Nine workers spoke at the meeting. One engineer. There was no need for the leaders of the democratic parties to speak after that. The engineer and two of the workers had not prepared their speeches, they just got on to the platform and spoke their minds, and it was damn good. Yes, yes, real Bolshevik speeches. One worker by the name of Schultz—I know him, a quiet, slow sort of chap —got up on the platform and asked Schneider point-blank, 'Isn't the Schneider who owns a big estate in Thuringia a relation of yours? Perhaps it's his land you're worrying about, Herr Schneider?' Schneider was quite taken aback. I don't know whether that estate-owner is related to him or not. At any rate, the scheme didn't work. The workers came out quite definitely in favour of land reform and democratization. And this is the biggest enterprise in the area. Very good. I'm leaving at once."

8

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," reported Vorobeitsev, touching his cap. "We've got one of the marauders who stole Professor Sebastian's car."

Lubentsov turned towards the speaker with a puzzled frown as if he were trying to remember something.

"Oh yes," he said at last. "Very well, bring him in."

Chokhov came in with the sergeant. The sergeant halted in the middle of the room with a look of unutterable weariness on his freckled boyish face. For a few moments he stared down at the floor, then he raised his head and looked at Leonov whom he judged to be the senior officer present. At that moment Lubentsov spoke. The sergeant glanced at him briefly, but since the commandant still wore his overcoat and cap he returned his gaze to Leonov.

"Why don't you report?" Lubentsov demanded. "Name, rank and unit."

"Sergeant Beletsky of the separate anti-tank group."

"Colonel Sokolov is your commander?"

"Yes," replied the sergeant, beginning to tremble, his eyes still fixed on Lieutenant-Colonel Leonov.

"Who gave you permission to leave your unit?"

"I . . . I went without permission," the sergeant faltered.

"Yes, yes," Lubentsov said impatiently, "but what about the car? Who did you take it for? Yourself? What do you need a car for? Did you need it to transport something? Why don't you answer? I'm waiting for your explanation."

Since the sergeant made no attempt to explain, Lubentsov too fell silent.

At last the sergeant spoke. "I'm sorry, Comrade Commandant. It was just a lark. Just for fun." He repeated the phrase several times, looking from Leonov to Lubentsov and back, bewildered and distressed, not so much, it seemed, by a sense of guilt or fear of impending punishment as because he could not understand for the life of him who was the senior of the two and whom he ought to be addressing.

"What part of Russia do you come from?" the unexpected question sounded almost gentle amid the heavy silence of the room.

"I'm from Saratov, I was born in Saratov," the sergeant replied quickly and eagerly as if the fact of his hav-

ing been born in Saratov might be his salvation. "My people are from Saratov too. I lived there up to November the 12th, 1941, and on the 12th of November I was called up."

The young man spoke as if he were imparting a sacred confidence, but his words seemed to make no impression on his hearers, for they continued to regard him with unrelenting severity. On Chokhov's face alone there appeared a look of infinite sadness, but he was standing behind the sergeant and the latter could not see him.

But if the sergeant thought that all these officers were totally indifferent to his fate he was mistaken. Although Lubentsov eyed him with due severity, in his heart of hearts he was secretly cursing Chokhov and Vorobeitsev for having detained this man now that the car had been found and the main object of the search accomplished. He pictured Professor Sebastian's cosy little garden, the fountain with the cupid in the middle, and he reflected bitterly on the irony of it that this young man whose army career had begun in November 1941 should have had to end that career four years later in this cosy garden so far from his own home. And although Professor Sebastian and his daughter and the garden and the fountain were not directly to blame for uprooting this man and other Russian men from their pleasant homes in Saratov and elsewhere, nevertheless part of the blame was theirs too. Yet in spite of all this Lubentsov was in duty bound to turn Sergeant Beletsky over to the court martial on a charge of marauding. Moreover, this was not only a matter of duty, it was important and essential both for the sake of establishing sound and healthy relations with the local population and maintaining a high standard of discipline among the occupation forces.

He got up and went over to the desk, made out a warrant of arrest and handed it to Vorobeitsev.

"Take him to the guardhouse for the time being," he said, not looking at the sergeant. "Notify Colonel Sokolov and make out the necessary papers for the military tribunal."

Vorobeitsev clicked his heels and he and the sergeant left the room.

"I'm sorry for that lad," murmured Lieutenant-Colonel Leonov.

Lubentsov said nothing.

"He was only carrying out orders," said Chokhov. "He fought honourably all through the war. After all he's only a soldier. He was told to get a car, and he got it."

Lubentsov made no reply to this either and proceeded to gather up the papers on his desk and put them in a folder. Leonov and Pigarev put on their caps. Sergeant Veretennikov, assistant to the officer on duty, came in and announced that the car was ready.

Lubentsov rode with Leonov. Ever since they had met in Altstadt at the home of Auer the architect, they had been drawn to each other. Leonov was considerably older than Lubentsov—he was forty—but the difference in their ages did not make itself felt. In the course of their few brief encounters and their hasty exchange of impressions and opinions on various aspects of the commandant's functions, Leonov had sensed in Lubentsov that fine combination of unsophistication and intelligence that is called charm. Leonov had had far more experience of life than Lubentsov—to some extent he might have claimed to be a Civil War veteran, inasmuch as he had been picked up as a homeless waif by an artillery battery belonging to the famous 25th Chapayev Division. At the age of 16, in 1921, he had already been secretary of a Komsomol district committee in the Urals. He had lost both parents at an early age and from childhood the Soviet government had been both father and mother to him, and hence, unlike many others of his generation who took the So-

viet system more or less for granted, he loved that system and the whole Soviet way of life with a fervent, filial love of which he never spoke, but which nevertheless everyone sensed in him.

Since the driver of the car was a German the conversation was confined to matters of no particular importance. But the invisible presence of the fair-haired sergeant made itself felt, and both commandants thought about him. They seemed to see him standing helplessly in the middle of the big room, clenching and unclenching his fists, his head bowed.

"Politically, the important thing about that meeting is that the Germans have had their say," Lubentsov said. "It has convinced me more than ever that the reform must be a success. No army can bring freedom to a defeated country if its people do not want freedom. We can only give the initial spur."

"You are quite right," said Leonov. "But you mustn't forget that the average man does not always know what is good for him and what is bad. He has to be directed towards the correct solution. So what you call the initial spur can be a long and rather complex process."

Sergeant Beletsky, Lubentsov was thinking, is now sitting in the guardhouse waiting for his fate to be decided. And all that is part of the "complex process," part of the Soviet policy which we are carrying out in Germany. And although that sergeant is far dearer to me than ten neutral German professors who don't know today what they are going to say tomorrow, I am obliged to commit him for trial.

"That new Landrat of yours," said Leonov. "What is he like?"

"A theoretican. He has written a great many books."

"Theory and practice were very closely intertwined in the German chemical industry, you know. Professor Bosch, the IG Farbenindustrie executive, was also a lead-

ing chemist. So was Dr. Duisburg. You ought to have a talk with that Sebastian. I am sure he can tell you some interesting things about the German chemical industry.... By the way, you have one of the Farbenindustrie chemical works in your district."

"Yes, I know. We are going to begin dismantling it in a day or two."

"I think you ought to propose calling it off. After the land reform goes into effect we will need plenty of chemical fertilizer. Where are we going to get it? Are we going to haul it from Russia? That would be stupid! After all, explosives and mineral fertilizers are made from one and the same raw material—coal. It's only a matter of increasing or decreasing the quantity of one or another ingredient. I would advise you to raise the question. There is nothing simpler than to take machines apart and send them off somewhere, pack up laboratory equipment and load it in railway cars. But what then? Cart it all back again?"

They were driving into Altstadt. In another few minutes they pulled up at the commandant's office. Some twenty other cars were parked outside the building. Apparently all or nearly all the commandants in the region were here.

The conference did not last more than an hour. General Kuprianov did not care for lengthy discussions. He heard the reports of three commandants, commented briefly on their work, then gave the floor to Lieutenant-Colonel Gorbenko who reported that the draft of the land-reform act had been adopted by the German political parties and would be signed within a few days by the government of the province. General Kuprianov wound up the conference with a few parting admonitions.

"The confiscation of the landed estates and the big kulak farms and the division of the land among the peasants is about to begin. This is an extremely critical mo-

ment and much depends on its outcome. Keep your ears to the ground! We are undertaking something tremendous, something which in the final analysis will lead to the realization of the age-old dream of the German peasants, something for which Thomas Müntzer, the leader of the peasant revolution, died four centuries ago. The consequences of this land reform are incalculable. If it fails, history will never forgive us."

General Kuprianov was not given to eloquence, and if what he had said sounded like a speech its purpose was to prevent the petty details of daily routine from blinding the commandants to the fact that their work was of major importance for European history and not only for their personal service record.

When the conference was over and the commandants were leaving the general's office, Kuprianov called Lubentsov over.

"Have you had your supper?" he asked. "No? Very well, get Leonov and come over to my place."

Pigarev had been waiting for Lubentsov downstairs but when he saw Lubentsov among a select group of commandants whom the general had obviously invited to his place, he felt slighted, stared enviously after them and drove off in a huff.

On the way to the general's rooms through the sleeping city Lubentsov told Kuprianov about the chemical plant.

"I believe you're right," he said, after pondering the matter for a few minutes. "We shall stop dismantling for the time being. I'll get in touch with the administration chief and see what he has to say about it."

At last they reached the house where the general lived.

"Sh," Kuprianov warned the others as he opened the door. They followed him on tiptoe to a large room with a street lamp shining in at the window.

"Make yourselves comfortable," said the general. "But

be as quiet as you can. My wife has just arrived. She's asleep. Tired out from the journey. I wasn't able to meet her at the station. Held up at a conference with the Germans."

Lubentsov could not get the young sergeant out of his head, and, after some hesitation, told Kuprianov the whole story. From the manner in which it was told the general must have sensed the doubts that were troubling Lubentsov, but he made no comment. He made a helpless gesture and changed the subject.

"That Schneider incident ended up very well," he said. "You see we now have a definite target. The democratic parties—including the sober-thinking members of Schneider's own party—now know whom they have to fight. The fact that he and his supporters are opposed to the land reform is no news for us. But having come into the open with his views he has been forced to expose his hand. That is good. It is impossible to fight in the dark." He gave a low laugh. "His forgetting his coat is good too. Rather symbolic. By the way, the coat was sent up here. Tomorrow I shall return it to him. I shall enjoy that."

After supper Kuprianov persuaded Lubentsov and Leonov to accept a bottle of vodka and a tin of caviare apiece.

"You are the farthest away from us," he said. "The commissary supplies don't reach you. Most of it gets stranded en route. Take it, take it."

9

Among the many consequences of the meeting at the big Lauterburg works was Lubentsov's new-born interest in the place, its workers and engineers, their living conditions and state of mind. Visiting the works the fol-

lowing day, he could hardly recognize the place, so greatly had it changed since he had first been there. He marvelled at the transformation wrought by the presence of workers; those very same warehouses, yards, red brick workshops, and narrow-gauge tracks looked quite different now that man had given meaning to this chaos of buildings and the labyrinth of steel and stone.

"Workers are always workers, even German workers," Chegodayev's words came back to him and he could not help but agree as he looked at the blue-overalled workmen standing at their machines or riding the waggonettes that scurried about the vast factory yards. The grimy face of the engine driver looking out of the window of the yard engine; the hoarse shouts of the crane operators hovering high over this world of smoke and steam, the foremen in their blue jackets with slide rules sticking out of their pockets; the smell of steel shavings and lubricating oil in the machine shop—in a word, the vast industrial panorama impressed Lubentsov with that sense of purpose and force which affects anyone visiting a large factory.

But now Lubentsov was interested less in the works and its production programme. He was interested in the people who worked here and towards whom after yesterday's meeting he cherished a feeling akin to tenderness.

He wanted to know what place he occupied in their thoughts—or perhaps not he personally so much as what he stood for here. Did they understand the honesty of his intentions, his fervent desire that the state interests of the Soviet Union should coincide with the interests of the German workers—for he was deeply convinced that these interests did coincide. As he walked slowly through the factory accompanied by Engineer Marx, Lubentsov scanned the faces of the workers he met. They in their turn observed the commandant closely, following him with their eyes.

In the interest of truth it must be said that at that time the German workers were somewhat wary of the Soviet Military Administration. There was much that was not clear to them and it could not be said that the sense of guilt for the late war was particularly firmly rooted in their minds. That feeling existed, but was being quickly forgotten, which is only natural under the circumstances. And since it was being forgotten, many workers—including some of the most honest-minded—questioned the action of the Soviet Union, a workers' state, in exacting heavy reparations from Germany and dismantling plants and factories, thereby damaging the interests not of the former rulers of Germany, for they were out of the picture now, but of the German population at large. They could understand why the Americans and British did this, but surely it was not right for Soviet people to do the same, or approximately the same thing. And notwithstanding the fact that the German workers knew—for they could not help knowing—of the colossal damage the German army had inflicted on the Soviet Union and hence on Soviet people, they, naturally enough, took their own plight more closely to heart.

And yet in spite of all these complications and contradictions they were workers and at the decisive moment they had voted in favour of democratic reform. These workers would indeed have been greatly surprised to discover how elated the Soviet commandant was by what they had done.

Lubentsov left the factory and went to the town hall to pick up Professor Sebastian and take him on a tour of the countryside. But the professor was not in his office. He had gone to Halle on the invitation of Professor Rüdiger, the aged president of the province.

He returned late that night, much upset. Rüdiger had shown him the draft of the land reform which he, as the president of the province, was to sign. Rüdiger did not

want to sign it, and had summoned his old friend Sebastian in order to consult with him. Professor Sebastian was horrified by the project. He was opposed to the whole idea of reform, or at any rate he wished to have nothing to do with it. He had been present during a conversation between Rüdiger and his deputy, a Communist named Karl Wandergast. Wandergast had tried to convince Rüdiger of the necessity for the measure. He was thoroughly familiar with German history of the last few decades and he backed up his argument with a host of facts and personal reminiscences.

"But can't you see that the Junkers stand for war!" he cried. "If you don't want a Reichswehr you must see to it that the landed estates are abolished. If you don't want a revival of fascism you must put an end to the landowning class."

As he spoke, he shook his right hand which had been mutilated in the Mauthausen concentration camp. The gesture, though unconscious, was more convincing than any argument.

Later on, Rüdiger had been visited by a Soviet general, the chief of the Military Administration, a man of political bent and keen intelligence for whom Rüdiger had the greatest respect and whom he considered a sincere friend of the German people. The general had ostensibly come on other business, but before he had been there five minutes the talk had turned to the land reform, though he did not seem to be particularly interested in the subject.

"Do you really think," he said with a gentle smile, "that we believe in reform purely for the sake of dogma, for the sake of putting some abstract theory—however correct—into life? Do you really believe us to be so bigoted and narrow-minded? Land reform is a necessity. It is a normal democratic reform which the bourgeois revolution left undone."

On returning to Lauterburg in his Mercedes, Sebastian learned that the commandant had been looking for him. In his present mood, however, he did not wish to see Lubentsov and have to listen to more arguments which were now so familiar. Retiring to his office, he gave orders that if anyone phoned they were to say that he had not yet returned.

Sebastian had no doubt that Rüdiger would sign the land reform law. He knew the old man well. At worst he would resign. The Russians would not like that. But what was he, Sebastian, to do? Also resign? He was opposed to the land reform. He was opposed to any sort of reform. Why? With his natural capacity for clear thinking he frankly admitted to himself that he was against reform for the simple reason that all his numerous friends and relations, and indeed all his own principles and views were against it. He believed that it was wrong in principle to deprive anyone of his property. But that was not all. An important consideration was that this property belonged to his own friends and acquaintances, to people of his own circle. He agreed with the Communists that the landholding system in Germany had given rise to many revolting phenomena in the past, that the landed estates had been nests of reaction, the seat of the officer caste that had subsequently placed themselves at the service of Hitler. He was willing to admit that it was necessary to confiscate the estates of the war criminals and nazi leaders whom he loathed with all his being, but he could not agree to confiscation of all estates simply because they were large.

After all, would the people be happy with their small farms? Could men be happy in general?

The janitor lighted the fire and the professor, gazing at the fire and smoking a cigarette, repeated to himself: "Can man be happy in general?" But life was insistently demanding decisions and Sebastian willy-nilly had to

return to the issue of the moment. The faces of Rüdiger, Wandergast, the general, Schneider, Lerche, and lastly, the live blue eyes of the young commandant passed before his mind's eye.

One could not help feeling that the actions of the Soviet officers were based on a deep inner conviction. Sebastian could well understand their hatred for landowners. For the Russian landowners. Sebastian understood that hatred and respected it. But that was not reason enough for him to hate the German landowners. To say the truth, he believed that the German landowners were far more clever, honest, high-minded and intelligent than the Russian had been. But then had he not on similarly flimsy grounds once considered Wilhelm II a much finer, pleasanter and more clever man than Nicholas II? In 1917, on learning that the Russians had overthrown Tsar Nicholas II, he, Sebastian, had considered this a perfectly natural, just and sensible thing to have been done. But even then in February 1917 it had not occurred to him that Emperor Wilhelm II might share the same fate. And when the very next year the Kaiser had been deposed, Sebastian took it as nothing short of a catastrophe. Before very long, however, Sebastian had not only been reconciled to the fact, but considered it to be perfectly reasonable and just, and fully in accord with the interests of the German people.

Yes, we Germans are conservatives and philistines, he reflected. We are afraid of social perturbations and change. It was because of our fear of social upheavals that we permitted Hitler to carry out his coup which ultimately led us to our present plight. Was not Hitler allowed to take over power just because he assured the capitalists and landowners that their private property would not be endangered?

If he did not sign the law he would most likely be removed from his post. All the better. He had already heard

some caustic comments from his friends about his collaboration with the Russians. Sign the law? That would cause friction with friends in both parts of Germany, he would be placed in the position of having betrayed the interests of those whose opinion he valued. Of course he could allow it to be rumoured that he had been forced to sign. And to some extent that would be true. In recent years mankind had grown accustomed to force and submitted to it; people no longer condemned base deeds committed under compulsion.

The whole issue would have been far less complicated if Sebastian had only to reckon with the opinion of his old friends. But he had new friends now—the Lauterburg anti-fascists, the workers and the peasants. They showed the deepest respect for the professor who was their Landrat: they trusted him, treated him as one of themselves and confided their troubles and doubts to him. Many of them now occupied various positions in the municipal government and had thrown themselves heart and soul into their work, displaying a great deal of common sense and ability. Even the touchy and suspicious Lerche had complete faith in Sebastian.

Yes, Professor Sebastian was loath to betray the confidence of these people. They considered him an anti-fascist, a fighter for the new Germany. He could not disappoint them.

True, he had not fought Hitler, but neither had he served him in spite of all the temptations placed in his way. He had turned down a most attractive offer of practical work in the chemical industry and had retired to write a theoretical course compiled from lectures he had delivered years before in Halle University. High-placed emissaries had been sent to him on several occasions, and he had once received a letter from Minister Funck himself. But he had not allowed himself to be persuaded. He had impatiently awaited Hitler's defeat and had believed

firmly in that defeat even when the nazi regime was at its zenith. And now that the debacle had come he did not know what he wanted.

While Sebastian was thus wrestling with his doubts and hesitations a third course was suddenly opened to him. Late one night Erika telephoned to his office and asked him to come home at once. A big surprise awaited him there. His son Walter whom he long ago had given up for lost, had arrived. Walter had come from Frankfort on the Main armed with a permit issued by the American occupation authorities. He was on his way to the American zone of Berlin and had stopped off to pay a visit to his father.

10

Walter Sebastian had not come to Lauterburg alone. He was accompanied by an American major, a short, stocky individual of distinctly non-military appearance. This major had a peculiar habit of fingering everything he saw. If the object that interested him—a vase, a curtain, a book or a note-pad—happened to be beyond his reach he would contrive on some pretext to move closer to it in order to lay his lean, hairy hand on it and stroke it gently. His fingers were never still; when they were not toying with some object they would continue to rub against each other. This irritating habit of the major's spread an atmosphere of nervous strain about him although he himself appeared to be utterly unaware of it.

Sebastian the elder had been certain that his son was being held in some concentration camp or prison in the American zone, since he had occupied some rather prominent posts in the nazi chemical industry. His first thought, on seeing the American, was that his son was under arrest, but before a few minutes had passed he understood that he had been mistaken. Walter was

plainly acting in some sort of advisory capacity to the American.

Walter had aged considerably since his father had last seen him; at thirty-seven he looked like a man of fifty. He was almost entirely bald; all that remained of the magnificent head of blonde hair that had once been his pride was a thin wisp that barely covered his crown. On the whole, the professor hardly recognized his son in this stout, aging man with the heavy-lidded eyes and the tired mouth that drooped at the corners. They had not seen each other for four years, Walter had been in the Saar all through the war.

Walter at once began to persuade his father to move to the American zone. He declared that everything was ready for the transfer, that Sebastian would be assured of a warm welcome and that he could have any position he chose in the chemical industry. Herman Schmitz, Walter said, had personally asked him to tell Sebastian that he would be very glad to see him.

"What? Isn't he in prison?"

"Yes, he is," Walter replied casually. "But he was given a month's leave to visit his family and recuperate."

This struck Sebastian as strange, but he said nothing. In the meantime Erika had laid the table. They had given Frau Weber the evening off so as not to be disturbed.

"I see you are not very well off," remarked Walter, glancing at the modest repast.

"We are no worse off than most people," Erika replied with unexpected heat.

Walter raised his heavy lids and for a moment his eyes held a look of pain mingled with sympathy. But he made no further comment.

"You will receive officer's rations and your salary in dollars," he said to his father. "You can have any laboratory you wish."

The old man looked at his son with curiosity.

"I am no longer a private individual, Walter," he said with a smile. "I am the Landrat, you know, the head of the local government. I cannot simply get up and go."

"You are very naive, Father," Walter said dryly. "Don't you know this self-government claptrap is merely the screen behind which the occupation authorities do exactly as they please? Not only here, but in all the zones."

Sebastian threw a quick look at the American, but Major Collins' face was as expressionless as before. Perhaps he did not understand German? A few minutes later, however, Sebastian heard him make a few polite remarks to Erika in excellent German, almost without accent except for the slight sing-song intonation. Although he made no reference to Walter's offer to his father, the professor did not doubt that Walter had not spoken on his own behalf, that indeed he had spoken on behalf of much more highly placed officials than Major Collins. And for some reason this irritated Sebastian; he could not rid himself of the unpleasant feeling that the American was about to lay his narrow, hairy hand on him, Professor Sebastian, and to finger him the way he fingered the inanimate objects within his reach.

"Very well, I shall think it over," he said. In spite of himself he heard himself adding, "I am sorry I agreed to take the post. It has turned out to be far more complicated than I had thought."

"That's only the beginning," Walter said, ominously. "Once you're caught in that crude and terrible machine you'll see what democracy and self-government mean."

This annoyed Sebastian although he himself had been thinking much along the same lines.

"Are you referring to Mr. Collins' allies?" he queried, reddening with anger.

Mr. Collins, who for some minutes had been eyeing the tea-pot standing at the other end of the table, reached

out for it at Sebastian's question and ran his questing fingers over its shiny surface.

"Yes," he said, "I believe that was precisely what Mr. Walter had in mind." He pronounced "Walter" in the English manner.

Walter, encouraged by this official backing, spoke again. At the present time the world, he said, was divided and if thanks to Hitler's stupid policy the Russians had found a common language with the Anglo-Saxon world, from now on the situation would be radically changed.

"Then Rudolf Hess' idea is about to be realized?" Sebastian asked.

"Ach, what has Hess got to do with it!" exclaimed Walter in annoyance. He was amazed to encounter opposition from his father.

At that moment the door-bell rang. Erika went downstairs to answer it. A few moments later, to the surprise and dismay of the professor, the Soviet commandant entered the room. Everyone rose. Sebastian felt unaccountably embarrassed as he introduced Lubentsov to his son and the American. Lubentsov shook hands with them and sat down. As he did so he was conscious of a curious tension in the room, a strained, ambiguous atmosphere full of unspoken thoughts. It was something he felt, rather than saw or heard, something compounded of a thousand and one small details in the behaviour of those present: a faintly perceptible false note in the conversation, a nervous flicker of an eyelid—even the loud flapping of the window swinging back and forth in the wind. The impression lasted perhaps for no more than a few seconds, and it was too indefinite, too intangible to be taken seriously by a man like Lubentsov who had been brought up to distrust all intuitive processes of the subconscious.

Since he had come without his interpreter Lubentsov spoke in German—hesitatingly at first, but with increasing confidence until to his own surprise and delight he

found himself speaking quite fluently. Those long German monologues he had repeated laboriously to himself night after night before going to sleep were now bearing fruit.

He had come to ask whether Professor Sebastian could accompany him the next morning on a trip to some villages. Sebastian agreed. Lubentsov asked whether this would not inconvenience the professor, considering that he had visitors, but before the professor had time to reply, he apologized to Walter and the American and promised that he would not detain the professor very long and that he would be back in time for dinner without fail. After a momentary reflection he invited them all to come and dine with him next day.

"We can meet as soon as the professor and I return," he said. "I have two things that are popular even with people who don't like Russians—Russian vodka and Russian caviare. Last night a friend of mine presented me with some, and I shall be happy to share it with you and your friends, Herr Professor."

"Erika, why don't you serve us tea?" said the professor. Small beads of sweat had broken out on his forehead.

"Not for me, thanks," said Lubentsov. "I've just had some." He turned to the American. "Do you speak German?"

"Yes," replied Collins, adding politely, "I am amazed to see that you speak it so well."

I suppose I ought to have said, "You flatter me," Lubentsov thought, but he could not remember the German phrase.

"I am learning the language," he said instead. "It is not difficult in a country where even the little children speak German. Are you here on a long visit?" he asked. "Don't misunderstand me," he added quickly, "this is not an official question. Professor Sebastian's friends are above suspicion as far as we are concerned."

"We intend to stay a day or two," Walter replied.

"You are on your way to Berlin, I take it?" asked Lubentsov. At Walter's surprised look, he laughed. "There's no mystery," he explained. "I naturally wanted to know what a car with an American army licence plate was doing here, so I took the liberty of waking your driver and asking him."

"Where is the tea, Erika?" the professor demanded again. He had obviously forgotten that he had asked the same question a few moments before.

"Thanks, I just had some," Lubentsov said again.

He rose, shook hands and left. Collins too announced that it was time to retire, and Walter showed him to his room.

"That Russian is an insolent young pup," said Walter, returning to the room. "Behaves like a conqueror."

"Well, that's what he is," said Sebastian.

"How does your Mr. Collins behave?" said Erika hotly. "He paws everything as if he were at an auction sale or something." She seemed pleased that Lubentsov had put Walter and the American in their places. "If you ask me, our man is far nicer and more intelligent than yours and he treats Father with much more respect."

Sebastian said, "Even if you consider the Russians our enemies, Walter, I must tell you that to underestimate one's enemies is foolish. This young commandant enjoys tremendous prestige here, and our Lauterburg people, as you know, are not easy to please. He works twenty hours a day and nobody knows when he sleeps. He knows the situation in this district down to the smallest detail, just as if he had been born and bred here. What's more, he manages to find time to read a great deal, everyone here can tell you what German books he has read lately. Pastor Klaustal told me an anecdote about this young man that has been going about. It paraphrases the opening words of the Bible: In the beginning the earth was with-

out form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of the commandant moved upon the face of the waters. And the commandant said: Let there be light. And there was light. And the commandant saw that it was good, and he said: '*Davai, davai*!' "

"You see, he made Herr Seelenbach repair the power supply," Erika laughingly explained.

"I don't see how you can joke about all this," Walter said wearily. "After all, it is not a matter of there being a few decent Russians but of the policy the Russians are pursuing in our country." He paused for a moment. "I don't care what you do, but for goodness' sake don't compromise me in front of the American," he went on. "That Collins has influence in the economic division of the American Military Government. He is one of the key men of Dupont's. He is at present working on the Farbenindustrie archives. The future of our chemical industry depends in large measure on him."

Sebastian searched his son's face.

"I trust IG Farben will be liquidated in accordance with the Potsdam decisions?"

"Who knows, who knows?" said Walter. "It seems to me that the American officers hold different opinions on that score."

"Well, I shall think it over," muttered Sebastian.

After showing Walter to his room Erika rejoined her father. She switched off the upper light, leaving only the blue table-lamp, which had had a particular attraction for Collins' restless fingers that evening, and being in no mood for sleep she curled up on the sofa and looked searchingly at her father.

"Politics, politics everywhere!" he burst out. "They haunt you like a nightmare. A man can no longer enjoy a quiet life beside his own fireside. That frightful monster called politics has taken all that away. It penetrates into

your very soul. You drive it out of the door and it comes back through the window to torment you with its inevitable question: Whose side are you on? 'Don't imagine that keeping out of politics you can escape the consequences.' Bismarck said that. But what did he know? Politics of his time were child's play compared to ours. Gone are the days when every man could live for himself. Yes, Erika. The clash of great masses of people—that is what the 20th century means. Santa Claus brings his gifts not to good children but to lucky nations. 'Whose side are you on?' politics demand. 'You're mine,' says one side—not a human being, mark you, not Walter, not Dr. Schneider, not Professor Rüdiger, but a side, a tremendous camp. 'No, you're mine,' says the other side, Herr Lubentsov for instance, and again not he alone, but another tremendous camp, the camp for which he stands. And you can't take your alpenstock and run away from it all to the Harz Mountains, you can't even withdraw to the sanctuary of your own home, you can't flee to a hermit's cave. . . ."

11

It so happened that for several days after the evening described above, Sebastian spent most of his time with Lubentsov. Subsequently Lubentsov was given credit for having displayed remarkable insight by having guessed that the professor's visitors might have tried to influence him in the wrong direction. Actually, he had not planned it at all. He simply felt that the time had come to give Sebastian a clear idea of what the land reform meant, to show him how the peasants lived, including the refugees (or the settlers, as they were now more tactfully termed), in order that the professor might see for himself how vital it was to divide the big estates among those who cultivated the land. For Lubentsov believed the professor to

be a man of great integrity who would not permit personal prejudice to blind him to reality.

As they drove from village to village, Sebastian was surprised to see how thoroughly the commandant knew every aspect of life in the countryside, how well he remembered the names and the circumstances of large numbers of peasants and settlers. Contrary to custom, they avoided the town halls, the town councils and local officials in general and stayed over in the poorest cottages they could find, talking to the peasants and their families. Most of the talking was done by the peasants and the Landrat, the commandant merely asking questions from time to time and making occasional comments, and Sebastian was much impressed by the good sense shown by his countrymen and by the frankness with which they talked to the Soviet commandant, holding nothing back from him and confiding in him as if he was one of themselves.

On the other hand, he could not help admiring the tact of the young commandant and the inspired zeal with which he pursued his objective.

"The big landed estates must be confiscated," Lubentsov repeated time and again, backing this up by a hundred different arguments, and, chiefly, by facts. He did not fall back on history, as the German Communists and Social-Democrats usually had. He had no doubt that Sebastian knew more about German history than he did. Instead, he showed the professor the settlers' families huddled together in stables, sheds, half-ruined cottages and, in many cases, under the open sky. He encouraged the landless peasants to talk about their needs, to air their grievances. Sometimes, after visiting the cottage of some peasant, they would call on the owners of the local manor house, causing a flurry of anxiety in the quiet halls. After what the professor had seen in the village, the plentiful life here, the spacious rooms with their luxurious

appointments and the huge service quarters made him vastly uncomfortable. Left alone with some landowner of his acquaintance he would say, avoiding the other's eyes:

"You really ought to give up some of this. We all have to make sacrifices. It is wrong to go on living in the old way at a time when our fatherland is in such terrible distress...."

Lubentsov was frankly amazed at the instability of the professor's views. On more than one occasion he noticed that after talking with the estate owners Sebastian would begin to change his mind about the need for land reform. He would argue that small farms were unprofitable, that since many of the new settlers had no experience at all in farming they would be unable to produce enough farm products; that not all the estate owners were bad, some were excellent people who were ready to co-operate with the anti-fascist parties in every way and hence it was a mistake to deprive such people of their lands. On the other hand, after meeting the poor peasants and settlers, after seeing the appalling poverty there, he would say the exact opposite, bewailing the injustice of social relations "on this sinful earth," and would mutter:

"You are right, in many respects you are right."

The day after Walter's arrival, Lubentsov and Sebastian returned home around five o'clock in the afternoon. Lubentsov hurried at once into his rooms to see how the preparations for the dinner were progressing. He found everything ready. The platoon cook Nebaba, his face ruddy and shiny, stood at the tiled stove with his arms akimbo, watching old mistress Weber and the hired girl wiping the china. Ksenia was there as well. On the table in the dining-room stood a bottle of Moscow vodka and a tin of fresh caviare.

Lubentsov sent Ksenia to call the guests over and in about fifteen minutes all four appeared, Sebastian with his son and daughter and the American. Of the Russians Kasatkin, Yavorsky and Ksenia were present, besides Lubentsov. Kasatkin had at first refused to come, seeing no necessity for the whole affair, but Lubentsov had insisted.

The vodka was a great success both with the Germans and the American, who in his turn had brought down a bottle of whisky.

According to the Russian custom, Lubentsov proposed a great many toasts—drinking first to his guests, then to the German people, the American army, and lastly to faithful adherence to the Potsdam decisions.

He felt extremely tired and would have much preferred to be in bed: there is nothing more fatiguing than forced gaiety. But in his capacity of host he had to keep the conversation going, to laugh, to talk to each of his guests in turn and not to forget any of them for any length of time. He spoke German and when he lacked words he switched to Russian, and then Yavorsky and Ksenia at opposite ends of the table translated in an undertone: Yavorsky, in a friendly manner with a fixed, but pleasant smile on his full lips, Ksenia, with complete indifference and an expressionless face.

From time to time Yavorsky took up the thread of conversation himself, for which Lubentsov was profoundly grateful. He spoke about the Moscow Art Theatre, the Soviet ballet, music and the cinema, contriving to slip in a remark about the two Moscow theatres that had been damaged by German bombs. He spoke well and Lubentsov was proud of him.

After dinner Lubentsov invited his guests to a film show at the house where the commandant's platoon was quartered. The hall was filled with Russian soldiers. As the guests took their seats, Lubentsov noticed the soldiers stealing glances at Erika and those glances told him

something he had not realized before. Erika was beautiful.

The picture was the *Youth of Maxim.* Everyone was moved by it, even the American. When the lights went on he shook Lubentsov's hand for a long time as if Lubentsov had been the leading character in the picture or at least its author. The soldiers again stared at Erika.

By the time the company returned to Sebastian's house it was already dark. The moon was out and the scent of the flowers in the garden was intoxicating. The American reached out his hand and fingered the petals; Erika watched him with a hostile look in her eyes.

Lubentsov said good-bye and was about to go when Erika hastily whispered something in her father's ear and Sebastian invited all those present to his daughter's birthday the following week. Lubentsov observed Walter shrug his shoulders.

The next day Lubentsov and Sebastian again set out for the countryside. This time their route lay not in the hilly part of the district as the day before, but in the flat country on the eastern side. On the way Lubentsov brought up the subject of Sebastian's son for the first time. He inquired what Walter's occupation had been before and what he was doing now.

"He is an engineer."

"A chemist too?"

"Yes."

"A big specialist, I suppose?"

"Yes. He is rather a capable engineer."

"Is he working for the Americans?"

"I do not know for sure. I suppose so." Then he added after a minute, "He is helping them to sort out the archives."

"You must forgive me for not giving you an opportunity to spend as much time with your son as you would like after such a long separation, but you know,

with us, Russians, work always comes first. Work for the common cause, of course."

"I have noticed that," observed Sebastian.

"And this is a particularly critical moment. So many cardinal problems are being decided. I believe that the fate of Germany for many years to come is being decided now."

"Possibly," said Sebastian.

They drove into the large village now quite familiar to Lubentsov: there was the pond in the middle, the little Rathaus and the tiny church, and beyond were the tops of the trees looking over the wall that enclosed the von Melchior grounds.

A small bonfire was burning beside a shed standing in the middle of a vegetable field. Several women were busy cooking at the fire. A thin little girl of about ten with flaming red hair saw them approaching and cried out:

"Der russische Oberstleutnant mit den blauen Augen ist gekommen!"

Sebastian burst out laughing.

"You're quite famous around here," he said.

Lubentsov flushed. "I've been here a good many times."

Two men came out of the shed—a very old man and a red-haired giant with his arm in a sling.

"Hullo, Klappenberg!" Lubentsov greeted him. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing much. Hurt my hand a bit."

Lubentsov took Sebastian into the shed and pointed without a word to the straw pallets on the floor and the children huddled in a corner. Then he walked out of the shed and Sebastian followed him.

"Sit down and have a talk with Klappenberg and this interesting old chap," said Lubentsov, "while I go and hunt up the bürgermeister. I have a bone to pick with

him. Last time I was here he promised to move these people into decent living quarters, but he doesn't seem to keep his promises. Ah, there he is."

"It's their own fault," cried Weller as he came hurrying up. "They don't want to go, Herr Kommandant!"

"Who doesn't want to go? The settlers?"

"That's right. They won't be moved," confirmed Helmut Reinicke who had arrived with Weller. His fresh young face expressed genuine distress at the failure to make any headway with the moving of the settlers.

Lubentsov turned to Klappenberg.

"Is that true?" he asked.

"Where can we go?" Klappenberg said with a sigh. "Nobody wants to let us in. I was told to move in to Biber's place. He's a poor man himself. He has hardly enough room for his own family. Of course he doesn't want us."

"Biber?" Lubentsov turned to the bürgermeister. "Why Biber? He has seven children. We had in mind the well-to-do homes which have plenty of space. After all, this is a temporary measure. We're going to build houses. Did you move anyone into Fleder's place?"

"Oh yes. Fleder offered to take some settlers himself," said Weller and turning to Sebastian he went on. "He has a huge place, Herr Landrat. And in general he's a very generous person, easy to get along with. But the others refuse to take anyone in. Günter threatened to burn down his house if he has to let strangers in."

Lubentsov went with Weller and Reinicke to the village.

On the other side of the pond they were met by Hans Fleder, a tall, broad-shouldered man of about forty-five, with a small neat moustache and a green hat on his head. He shook hands cordially with Lubentsov and

falling into step with him inquired politely after his health.

"You have lost weight, Herr Kommandant," he said, shaking his head, and from his tone and expression one would have thought that the health of the commandant was a matter of the deepest concern to him. "You work too hard, my dear man. Of course work is very important, but one must take time off to relax sometimes. Ah, you have no one to take care of you. An orderly, perhaps, but what can an orderly do? Cook soup and pitch a tent.... I know, I was a colonel's orderly myself once, I know all about it. You ought to come and spend a week out here with me. One week would make a different man of you." As Lubentsov made no reply, Fleder changed the subject. "Our country-folk are behaving very shabbily, I am sorry to say. They have forgotten the meaning of kindness. They go to church and they read their Bible, but they behave like beasts. I have taken in four families, Herr Kommandant. And if necessary I can accommodate another two or three families. At a time like this one has to make sacrifices." By this time a small knot of people had gathered around. "Yes, yes, Günter," Fleder said, turning to a thin, crippled man leaning on a stick. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. It isn't fair to vent your spleen on innocent folk." There was a titter at this. "Ask Herr Kommandant here, he will tell you."

"You have a glib tongue, Fleder, everyone knows that," muttered Günter. "It's all right for you. Your place is as big as a palace."

"Well, yours isn't so small either. You have six rooms. You could part with one of them. By the way, Herr Kommandant, I have started something here. A sport grounds for our young folk. I have donated some twenty cubic metres of lumber for the purpose. My own property. It will be a first-class stadium."

Reinicke smiled shyly.

"I'm training two football teams," he said. "We'll soon challenge Lauterburg."

Fleder said good-bye and went off to talk to the Landrat whom he had spotted on the other side of the pond.

When Lubentsov finished his business in the village and returned to the settlers' shed, Sebastian was no longer there. Armut ran over to Fleder's house to fetch him.

"An excellent person," Sebastian said of Fleder as they drove out of the village. "A splendid farmer and a very generous, kind-hearted man."

At the next village Lubentsov stopped the car outside the manor house. It was occupied by settlers. Lubentsov grunted with satisfaction.

"You see?" he said to Sebastian. "That partly settles the problem."

"Where is von Born?" asked the professor, who knew the village and was personally acquainted with the local landowner.

"In the West. He's been writing threatening letters from there."

"A disgusting man. I know him. One of the worst."

"Are the others any better?"

"Some of them are very nice, cultured people."

Lubentsov grunted. "Give them a chance and these nice, cultured people will gobble you up. They are a clever, grasping lot who know how to cling to their power and property no matter what happens. It was they who nurtured the officer caste which made short shrift of the German revolutionaries in 1918 and 1923. It was they who helped to put Hitler in power. Family estates, you say? How can anyone accept an inheritance acquired by unjust means and consider himself an honest man!"

At that moment a noisy band of children carrying rakes, spades and trowels came trooping through the

wide-open gates of the manor house. The sight moved Sebastian. He laid his hand on Lubentsov's shoulder.

"Don't think I have no heart," he said hoarsely. "I swear to God I would not mind if a dozen or so of the most ravenous landowners were deprived of their land for the sake of the happiness of these children."

They stood for a while in silence, then went back to the car. Bürgermeister Langheinrich was waiting for them.

"*Molodets*," Lubentsov said in Russian. Langheinrich knew what the word meant and he smiled with pleasure.

The three went to Langheinrich's house where they sat for a while over a glass of milk and some bread, chatting pleasantly.

"A good man!" Sebastian said later of the bürgermeister. "A splendid combination of peasant honesty and broad-mindedness."

12

"Why should I bother with this professor? Why must I be constantly bolstering up his morale and fussing with him?" Lubentsov asked himself time and again these days when sorely taxed by Sebastian's vacillations. "After all, I am a representative of the military authorities. Perhaps Kasatkin is right in accusing me of leniency."

To tell the truth, Lubentsov was puzzled by the prestige which Sebastian with all his spinelessness enjoyed among his countrymen. True, he was a clever man, warm-hearted, impulsive, a little eccentric perhaps, but with none of that heavy solidity common to so many Germans of his age and position. Lubentsov liked him for that. In general, had it not been for the official element in their relations, he would have taken much pleas-

ure in associating with the professor and would doubtless have been proud of his friendship.

In spite of his frequent annoyance at Sebastian's inconsistencies, Lubentsov nevertheless sensed, and in time came to understand, wherein lay the secret of the professor's power over people. True, he was not a fighter. He was too mild, too forgiving and too prone to indulge in fruitless soul-searching. But he was a man of scrupulous honesty and moral integrity, and this it was that drew people to him. A man who is honest with himself and with others is almost a fighter. And particularly did this hold true in nazi Germany where all moral standards had been swept away.

Lubentsov too was an honest man but he was a man of action besides; he not only took the injustices and abominations of life deeply to heart, but unlike Sebastian he tried to find a way of immediately rooting out the evils. He too, like Sebastian, had his moments of doubt and hesitation, but he never thought aloud as Sebastian did; he could not permit himself to postpone decisions even if these decisions were at times premature. It was this impatience of his that was the principal cause of friction between them.

There were times indeed when he actually regretted having persuaded Sebastian to accept the position of Landrat, and sometimes, goaded beyond endurance by the old man's waverings, he was prepared to admit that honesty might well be a hindrance when it came to deciding important and urgent issues.

However, notwithstanding these moments of despair, Lubentsov did not stop trying to "educate Professor Sebastian in the Communist spirit," as Captain Yavorsky jokingly put it. He continued to take the professor with him on his tours of the countryside, factories and mines, and to spend evenings with him discussing everything under the sun.

Walter spent four days in Lauterburg. In these four days he developed a violent dislike for the Soviet commandant. The old man spent all his time with him; they drove out of town together, came back together, and dined together; sometimes Erika served them dinner apart and they withdrew to another room on the plea of having to talk shop. The door-bell was constantly being rung by local administration officials, army officers or functionaries of the various democratic parties summoned either by the Landrat or the commandant.

Walter and Collins sat in solitude smoking nervously, and waiting in vain for an opportunity to have a confidential talk with the professor. At last their patience gave out and they announced that they were leaving.

"Leaving?" Sebastian realized with a sense of guilt that he had seen very little of his son on this visit. At the same time he felt a certain relief that Walter and Collins were going. Before his departure, however, Walter did at last succeed in talking to his father in private. They were closeted together for over an hour and finally emerged, looking much upset.

After seeing Walter and Collins to the car, Sebastian returned to the house plunged in gloom, more than ever a prey to doubt and indecision. He and his son had agreed that Walter would stop at Lauterburg on his way back from Berlin and that in the meantime the professor would make up his mind.

But the professor was no sooner inside the house than he was again caught up in the swift torrent of events. Rüdiger telephoned from Halle much agitated with the news that he had signed the land reform law, and that now the deed was done. After that Menshov, Lerche, Jost and Vorländer came to report that by some machination on the part of the agricultural department a number of the bigger estates were being turned over to monasteries and charitable organizations through the

simple device of falsifying the records. The *Grundbuch* had been found to have been tampered with in the case of some ten estates. The Communists and Social-Democrats demanded that the man in charge of the land registration department be removed and replaced by a land reform supporter. After they had gone, the commandant himself came. He congratulated the professor on the adoption of the land reform law and informed him that the Soviet Military Administration had decided not to dismantle the chemical factory but to use it for manufacturing fertilizers. The factory had formerly belonged to IG Farben and had produced explosives; at the present time, pending the SMAG decision, it was turning out glissantine, or anti-freeze, for automobiles.

"Will there be much difficulty in switching over to fertilizers?" Lubentsov asked.

"No."

"Could you go to the factory and prepare a detailed memorandum on the matter?"

"Certainly."

The commandant looked tired but happy. Erika came in.

"Have you heard the good news?" he said to her. "The land reform law has been passed!"

"Yes, I heard about it," she replied with a smile.

"Splendid, don't you think?"

He positively radiated good-will.

"Won't you stay for dinner?" urged Erika.

"Sorry. I can't. Too much to do. As a matter of fact, with your permission, I am going to carry off Herr Sebastian."

"Again! Where to this time?"

"The chemical factory."

"Is it so urgent?" Sebastian attempted a feeble protest.

"Of course." Lubentsov almost said "*davai, davai*" but caught himself in time. "We'll get something to eat somewhere on the way. You understand, don't you, Professor, that this is too important to be put off."

"Very well, let's go," sighed Sebastian. But the sigh was only half sincere, for it was pleasant to feel himself needed, indispensable in fact.

With the adoption of the land reform law a period of intensive work began for the German municipal authorities and for the commandant's office. Implementing the law turned out to be a far more complicated process than Lubentsov had imagined.

In the first place it was necessary to ascertain the actual size of each estate, for the land department's figures were out of date. And each day brought some unforeseen occurrence, such as post factum division of property between father and sons, sudden divorces, and diverse other ingenious devices on the part of the big farmers to prove that they owned less than one hundred hectares.

The bürgermeisters and peasant committees were driven almost to despair sometimes by the cunning and deceit displayed by the wealthy minority in their fierce struggle with the overwhelming majority of peasants who were to benefit by the reform.

One day Hans Fleder came to see Lubentsov. He sat down, inspected the commandant's private office with a slow appraising glance which paused at the portraits, then turned to Lubentsov and inquired after his health. Lubentsov replied that he was well.

"I am glad to hear it," said Fleder. "Health is so very important, especially for a man like yourself who has the responsible job of administering the lives of so many people. But for goodness' sake don't take any stimulants, they may heighten your working capacity for a time, but not for long. . . ."

Lubentsov began to tap impatiently on the desk while to himself he had to admit that Fleder's calm, courteous manner disarmed him. Fleder was perhaps the only person in the Lauterburg district who talked to the commandant in this manner—not as a citizen to a military commandant, but as an older and more experienced man to a man younger and less experienced than himself.

"I did not want to come to you," Fleder went on. "I know how busy you are. However, circumstances compel me to appeal to you. The land reform committee is about to confiscate my land although I have no more than seventy hectares. I consider it both unlawful and unfair, and I would kindly ask you to look into the matter."

He said this without the slightest trace of annoyance. He looked calm and even cheerful and his voice had a genuine note of distress at being obliged to encroach on the time of such a charming person as the Russian commandant. Lubentsov put a call through to the village and asked for Weller. The bürgermeister confirmed Fleder's statement. Yes, his property had been measured by a special surveying team acting on instructions from the Landrat himself.

"Very well," said Lubentsov as he hung up. "I will attend to it myself."

Fleder rose, bowed and went out.

A few minutes later Sebastian burst into the office, fuming. He said that Lerche and the other Communists were going too far. They were doing just as they pleased, and now they had taken it into their heads to dispossess such an honest and exemplary farmer as Fleder, although they had no legal right to do it.

"These are the people you support!" Sebastian raged. "Your interpretation of the law invariably works against the individual."

Lubentsov did not reply. Instead he summoned Lerche.

"What's all this about Fleder's land being confiscated? You must abide by the law, you know," he said.

"The law!" cried Lerche with his usual bluntness. "If you want my opinion one hundred hectares is too much."

"You see?" said Sebastian. "That is how they settle the question. I resign. Do what you like, but I refuse to be a party to such practices. I cannot endure injustice."

Lerche turned pale.

"Washing your hands off the whole thing, eh?" he said. "Every time something goes wrong you threaten to resign. It's disgusting!" He turned to Lubentsov. "I've been to the village myself. Your Fleder is lying, if you'd like to know. I don't believe he hasn't more than seventy hectares. He's the richest farmer in the whole district. His daughter let slip that he has some property near Fichtenrode! What do you say to that?"

"It's a lie!" cried Sebastian. "Fleder is an honest man. You are so blinded by hate that you mistrust everybody!"

"I hate the rich, and I don't believe in their honesty! What's more, the peasants are on my side and not on yours, Herr Professor!"

"What do *you* say to that?" Sebastian turned to Lubentsov. His voice was shaking.

"I am afraid Lerche is right," Lubentsov replied calmly. "Fleder is a very wealthy man."

Sebastian stood for a moment or two stock-still, then he turned and strode out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Lubentsov shook his head.

"You must learn to keep your temper," he said to Lerche in reproval. "Investigate this business. Send someone to Fichtenrode with instructions to get at the truth."

The same day two members of the district reform committee left for Fichtenrode. They were accompanied by young Reinicke whom Lerche was grooming for the post of chairman of the rural reform commission. It was agreed that they report to the commandant as soon as they returned.

Soon the commandant's office grew deserted and silent. From the ground floor of the large house came the sound of an accordion and soldiers singing in chorus. Lubentsov, Menshov, Lerche and Jost sat upstairs in the commandant's private office drinking tea and waiting. It was after midnight when the messengers returned. They reported that according to the records Fleder did not own any land in the Fichtenrode area.

Within a few days the Fleder story became public knowledge. Even the newspapers in the Western zones carried reports of the incident. For the first time Lubentsov saw his name in print. The newspapers wrote in a tone of respectful irony, they called him a "noted enthusiast and one of the most zealous and efficient champions of the cause of doing away with the prosperity of the German peasantry."

After his row with Lerche, Sebastian ceased to visit or even to telephone to Lubentsov.

From Altstadt came endless inquiries about the "Fleder affair." Lubentsov was reproved for "excessive zeal." He soon became sick to death of the whole business. He called a conference of his staff and in his turn rebuked Menshov for displaying "excessive zeal" and failing to realize that the work of the commandant's office was constantly in the public eye. At the same time

Lubentsov flatly rejected the suggestion that Lerche should be removed from the district reform committee and replaced by some other Communist, Vorländer, for instance.

13

Lubentsov noticed that Vorobeitsev and Chokhov were not present at the conference.

"Did you give them some assignment?" Lubentsov asked Kasatkin. But it turned out that neither Chokhov nor Vorobeitsev had been given any assignments.

"Getting out of hand, if you ask me," said Kasatkin.

Lubentsov shook his head. Each time the door opened he looked up expecting to see Chokhov. But the conference ended and Chokhov did not appear.

For some reason his absence worried Lubentsov. He reproached himself for having seen so little of Chokhov lately, for leaving his friend so much to himself. Moreover, he disapproved of his association with Vorobeitsev to whom he had taken a definite dislike.

He left his office and walked down the corridor, pausing to look into the various rooms. With some surprise he noticed that the place had begun to look like any other government office. Officers sat at their desks receiving Germans, busily writing, telephoning or conferring with one another. Yavorsky was talking to a cinema proprietor about what films he was permitted to show and which were forbidden. Catching sight of Lubentsov, Yavorsky hurried over to him with a list of renamed streets and squares submitted by the town council. Lubentsov looked over it and approved of all the new names except one. It was proposed to change the name of Adolf Hitler Square to Karl Marx Square. The very juxtaposition of the two names such worlds apart struck him as inappropriate, and after some discussion it was decided to name the square after Friedrich Schiller.

Next door was Chegodayev's office, full of noise and tobacco smoke. Workers, members of industrial councils, Soviet Army engineers from the factories, and trade-union officials came here with their numerous demands and requests.

Chegodayev's lusty voice and hearty laughter could be heard all the way down the corridor. When Lubentsov came in Chegodayev sprang to his feet and reported in the approved military fashion:

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel, the industrial department is at present working on the plan of industrial output for the year nineteen forty-six. Captain Chegodayev reporting."

"At ease," said Lubentsov.

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," Chegodayev rattled on, switching at once to his informal "everyday" tone. "The owner of the copper mine has cleared out. The workers just phoned in. What shall we do? I think the workers ought to take over the show themselves."

"Yes, I think so too. Get in touch with Altstadt."

Menshov's office was also full of people. A deputation of peasants was there. Menshov took Lubentsov aside and told him that the Finkendorf community asked that von Born's estate should not be divided up.

"How's that?"

"They say that von Born's is a seed farm and ought to be preserved intact as a future agricultural co-operative, or 'provincial estate' something like a state farm. In their opinion that would be more expedient. The Communists and Social-Democrats support the idea. This is Langheinrich's initiative."

"Very good. A splendid idea. I am sure our chiefs will approve of it as well."

Lubentsov went through all the rooms, but did not find either Chokhov or Vorobeitsev. He went downstairs. The premises were deserted. Most of the soldiers

were out on assignments. Only Nebaba, the cook, was fussing over the stove, his face red as a lobster. Voronin was sitting in his cubby-hole writing something.

"Dmitry Yegorovich," said Lubentsov. "Do me a favour and find Chokhov, will you? He and Vorobeitsev have disappeared and no one knows where they've gone."

Voronin nodded without speaking and got up.

"I haven't seen you for ages either," said Lubentsov. "Up to my neck in this reform business. Well, how do you like the work? Satisfied?"

"It's all right. No complaints."

"What are the men like? A good crowd?"

"The men are all right. The sergeants too. Especially Veretennikov. He could qualify for second in command of the platoon any time."

"I ought to come down here more often," Lubentsov said guiltily. "It's like being back home in Russia. It's easier to breathe. Up there," he pointed to the ceiling, "up there it's hard going. Bit of a mess."

"I suppose it is," Voronin said with sympathy.

"Then you'll look for Chokhov, will you?"

Lubentsov went out of the cubby-hole, crossed a large room hung with Soviet posters and portraits, which served as something of a club-room, and went upstairs.

His reception hours had begun.

Ksenia ushered the visitors in, one after the other. The first caller today was a thin, scraggy man in a long black coat of old-fashioned cut. It was Pastor Klaustal, superintendent of the district Lutheran churches. Klaustal said that repair work on the cathedral had been practically completed, and he asked the commandant to come and look it over. Lubentsov promised to do so, but the pastor did not go. He continued to sit, slightly bowed, in the huge armchair which was big enough to

hold four men of his size. Lubentsov waited in silence, looking at his visitor questioningly.

"I should like to ask you a question if I may," the pastor said at last. Lubentsov nodded his head. "What in your opinion is the role of the church in the present situation?"

Lubentsov was somewhat taken aback. The question was entirely unexpected, and he did not know how to answer it. He recalled the thick volume on the history of the Church in Germany he had bought recently and regretted that he had had no time to look through it.

"You see," the pastor went on, "something of a controversy has arisen in our parishes in connection with the land reform. Speaking from the Christian point of view, the land reform is undoubtedly a blessing, inasmuch as it is in the interests of the poor. . . ."

Now, here was a subject Lubentsov was prepared to discuss all day if need be. He nodded eagerly.

"In this matter we are entirely in agreement," he said.

"On the other hand," continued the pastor, "many of the estate-owners and well-to-do farmers are excellent people, who treated the agricultural labourers from Russia and other countries with great kindness and . . . er . . . generally enjoy the sympathy and respect of the parishioners. Do you not think, Herr Kommandant, that one ought to show some consideration to these people?"

"Ah, so that's what it is," Lubentsov muttered, his face clouding. "We have a definite opinion on this point. We believe it is precisely these kind, excellent people you mention who are principally to blame for the disaster that has befallen Germany. It was they who created the German military caste. It was in their country homes that the officers of the Wehrmacht were brought up. And although they took such pride in their noble birth, they allowed themselves to be ruled by an obscure

Austrian corporal, because they believed that he would safeguard their property for them. They thought of nothing but their own personal well-being, and that proved their downfall. No, Herr Klaustal, here we can never agree, and I tell you so frankly, because I am not a diplomat, but a soldier. Besides, it is a matter of abolishing a class, not individuals. Germany without Hitler is still the same Germany; Germany without her landed gentry is a different country, a new country in which there will be no soil from which another Hitler might rise. But what is the use discussing the matter? The law has been adopted and it will be carried into effect. You can help your parishioners by giving your support and guidance to the poor and the dispossessed as the Church is supposed to. As for the cathedral, I shall come and see it. Today, if possible."

Klaustal went out.

Lubentsov rang the bell for the next visitor and almost gasped with surprise when the door opened and Erika Sebastian walked in. She came in slowly and hesitantly with a troubled look in her candid eyes.

"Sit down," said Lubentsov.

"I have come here because I have just learned that one of the soldiers who took our car has been arrested and is about to be court-martialled. I want to ask you.... They did not behave badly at all that time. They said they were taking the car for a few days. Perhaps they really did intend to return it.... As for what they said to me.... After all, is it a crime for a soldier to flirt with a girl if she is young and not altogether repulsive?"

Gracious, another all-forgiving Christian! Lubentsov thought to himself. He had a momentary vision of Sergeant Beletsky's face.

"That soldier," he said coldly, "violated army discipline. That, I'm afraid, is something that does not con-

cern you. It comes purely within the jurisdiction of the army."

She turned pale. "I see," she said and rose to leave. Suddenly he felt sorry for her, but he suppressed the feeling.

"You may put your testimony in writing," he added reluctantly, "and send it to us. All I can promise you is that your letter will be passed on to the proper authorities."

After she had gone the stream of callers continued, but Lubentsov found himself thinking of her again and again and he drove away her image, angry at himself for thinking of another woman than his own Tanya and accusing himself of being a weakling and a fool.

Towards the end of the day Professor Sebastian came. He had not seen Lubentsov for several days and they met rather coldly, although from time to time they stole curious glances at one another. Sebastian handed Lubentsov a typewritten sheet.

His resignation, flashed through Lubentsov's mind, and he mentally girded himself for an unpleasant interview. But glancing at the paper he brightened. It was a memorandum on the result of Sebastian's investigation of the chemical factory with recommendations as to what was to be done to switch over to a new line of output.

Lubentsov telephoned to Altstadt. General Kuprianov said that in view of the urgency of the matter it would be best if Sebastian came to SMAG to report in person. Marshal Zhukov himself was interested in the question, he said. Lubentsov hung up and told Sebastian what the general had said.

If the professor was flattered he did not show it. In a tone of chill formality he expressed his thanks for the invitation and said that he would leave the next morning. After which he bowed and went out.

"Is there anyone else there?" Lubentsov asked Ksenia.

"A deputation of agricultural labourers."

"Show them in."

Four men came into the room. Lubentsov noted with pleasure that Helmut Reinicke was one of them. He went over to the young man, shook hands with him and invited him and his friends to sit down.

"Well," he said when they were all seated. "What can I do for you, Comrades?"

The eldest of the four, a lanky fellow with a small wrinkled face, began a halting, confused speech.

"Herr Kommandant. We have come on behalf of a group of agricultural workers to speak to you about Herr Fleder." Lubentsov pricked up his ears. "Herr Kommandant, Herr Fleder is a very good man, he takes good care of his workers. Herr Kommandant, Herr Fleder feeds his workers well, tries to educate them, buys newspapers for them, communist and social-democratic newspapers. Herr Kommandant, Herr Fleder built a *Sportplatz* for the peasants, he gave his own money and his own lumber to build it with and he always gives our children presents at Christmas, very fine gifts too."

"Well, what do you want to do?" said Lubentsov. His face was grey. "Repeal the land reform? Go on living the way you've always lived and get presents at Christmas time? Is that what you want?"

"Oh no, Herr Kommandant, not at all, Herr Kommandant," said one of the men. "No, we're for ... we want the land divided up, we want to set up communes. That's what we want." He smiled sheepishly. "But we ask that Herr Fleder.... He hasn't got very much land anyhow."

"Are you for this too, Reinicke?" Lubentsov asked pointblank, and the lad blushed furiously and muttered something inaudible.

Lubentsov was silent for a long time, then, unable to keep silent any longer, he burst out:

"If Fleder has less than a hundred hectares he won't be affected by the law in any case. The law is quite definite on that point. Confound it, you Germans are the limit! When will you understand that you can live without masters, that you can be the masters yourselves."

"Herr Kommandant," Reinicke interrupted him. He was still very red and seemed on the point of tears. "Don't misunderstand us.... The land reform means everything to us. It's just that we ... that we...."

Lubentsov smiled sadly.

"Very well," he said. "We'll take your request into account."

They shuffled out of the office in silence.

There were no more callers that day. Lubentsov dismissed Ksenia and sat alone for a few minutes. Suddenly he thought of Chokhov and went to find out whether he had turned up. But there was still no sign of him.

Lubentsov went to the town hall where the district land reform committee had its premises and went upstairs to Lerche's office. Lerche already knew about the deputation.

"We'll kick that Reinicke out of the party!" he cried.

"There's no need to do that! That lad needs to be educated, not expelled. I think he's already damn sorry he had anything to do with the whole business. Now then, let's go and look over the church. I promised Klaustal. Only get Vorländer to come along."

Lerche shook his head. He did not approve of flirting with the Church, nor did he believe in any deviations from an inflexible line of policy which he sometimes visualized as a road stretching before him, dull and dreary perhaps, but straight as a die.

The three of them set out for the church.

The huge gap in the left nave had been filled in so skilfully that it was almost impossible to tell where it had been. The church was empty and every whisper evoked a loud echo. The old sexton hurried off to find Klaustal, and the pastor soon appeared. He showed them the tomb where a 13th-century German emperor and his wife lay buried. The full-length stone figures of the emperor and his consort lay side by side within a wrought-iron enclosure. The organ, undamaged by the bombings, spread its shining array of pipes over the entire width of one wall.

"Well," said Lubentsov, "everything seems to be in order."

His voice echoed hollowly in the empty church.

"The benches, Herr Kommandant," said Klaustal. "Nearly all the benches were burned, the rest were stolen. . . ."

Lubentsov reflected that the Germans liked to be comfortable even when praying. He turned to Vorländer:

"I suppose we must have new ones made. You will supply the timber. I hope you have good carpenters here? You have? Very good." He glanced at Lerche's gloomy face and suppressed a sudden desire to burst out laughing. It occurred to him that Lerche, though a fine, honest fellow, was nevertheless extremely bigoted in some respects, and was perhaps to a certain extent closer to the medieval monks who had inspired the building of this church than to the humanists who fought against them.

On returning to the office Lubentsov looked up Kasatkin again.

"Find Chokhov?"

"No."

"Voronin back?"

"No."

Voronin returned in the evening to report failure, but said he would resume the search after supper.

"No, that's enough," said Lubentsov dejectedly. "This isn't a kindergarten. They will have to be severely punished."

But Voronin, who liked Chokhov and would do anything to save him from unpleasantness, ate a hasty supper and went out again. Kranz was waiting for him outside the building.

"Come on," said Voronin, thrusting a loaf of bread wrapped in newspaper into Kranz's hand. "Where shall we go this time?"

Kranz thought for a moment.

"We might try Kleinpeterstrasse?" he suggested uncertainly.

"What sort of a strasse is that?"

Kranz hesitated.

"That's where the . . . er . . . the brothels are."

"Nothing doing," said Voronin firmly. "Not Captain Chokhov. He's not that kind. . . . Oh, all right, let's go."

Kleinpeterstrasse was an incredibly narrow street, too narrow even for a single car to pass. It was lined with three- and four-storey houses clinging close together. At first glance it looked much the same as any other street in Lauterburg, except for the frowzy women who could be seen at some of the open windows. Evidently these women usually accosted passers-by from the windows, but this time they did not do it, deterred perhaps by the red band on Voronin's sleeve—the insignia of the commandant's patrols. But the very first house the two men entered revealed the ugly story of the street. Every house contained six to eight "establishments" each with its proprietress and her "girls." The meagre furnishings of the tiny cubby-holes each with its iron bedstead, single chair and the inevitable wash-basin, and the frightened, repulsive faces of the "girls" who walked

about in various stages of undress revolted the by no means unsophisticated Voronin.

"Nice, very nice," he kept repeating grimly, glowering at Kranz as though he were in some way responsible for all this.

Nevertheless, with painstaking thoroughness he opened door after door and looked into all the rooms, thinking as he did so that after what he had seen that night he would probably never want to have anything to do with women again.

When at last they reached the end of the street, Voronin paused under a lamp-post, heaved a sigh of relief and spat. "To hell with it all!" he said.

Having failed to find Chokhov in Kleinpeterstrasse, Voronin said good-bye to Kranz and went home to report to Lubentsov.

Back in his own room, Voronin sat down to finish the letter he had been writing to his girl in Shuya.

"Dear Katya," he wrote, "I am terribly lonesome for you. And although Lauterburg is a prettier town than Shuya, I'd give anything to be back home because I've had just about enough of this place. The things you can see here would make your hair stand on end. Thank God I have you and that you live in a plain ordinary town like Shuya and not in some fancy place like this Lauterburg. Love and a thousand kisses."

14

While the search went on, Chokhov was in a village some fifteen kilometres from Lauterburg. It all began with Vorobeitsev, at whose place he had spent the night, waking him up at dawn and suggesting that they go hunting for hares.

"I know a German who'll let us have a good hound,

and I've got the guns and cartridges," Vorobeitsev had said. "There's plenty of hares hereabouts and by ten we're sure to be back in the office."

As regards abundance of hares, he was right. Germany was literally overrun by them at the time, for the Germans observed the ban on their using firearms of any kind very strictly indeed. The young man, too, who accompanied Vorobeitsev and Chokhov on their expedition would not even hold a gun, but limited himself purely to the duties of a guide. His dog, a brown long-eared hound that answered to the name "Elbe," raced ahead of the hunters, now loping in and out the tall grass, now stopping to glance back at the men, all aquiver with the excitement of the chase.

Chokhov had never gone in for game hunting, but he got into the spirit of the thing as soon as Vorobeitsev shot the first hare, which sprang up from under Chokhov's feet. This initial success unleashed Vorobeitsev's eloquence and he began bragging of his prowess on the trail. While serving at a replacement centre near Moscow he had kept the officers' mess supplied with hares and wild fowl all through the autumn of 1943, he claimed, that was why he had not been sent on to the front for almost a year.

Since the first hare by rights should have been his, Chokhov decided not to allow himself to be caught napping a second time. Yet he was not fated to bag the second hare either, even though he saw it first, for he hesitated a fraction of a second too long out of fear that the animal streaking through the grass might be the dog. Vorobeitsev was too engrossed in his hunting yarns to take aim before the hare was gone. He was very annoyed with Chokhov, who said nothing, knowing that he was to blame.

Soon Vorobeitsev suggested they halt for a rest and a drink—as a matter of fact the best thing about hunt-

ing was the chance it gave one to drink out in the open air, he said. On a signal from him, the young German who was carrying the hare they had bagged as well as a well-laden hamper of food, laid down his burden and spread a blanket on the ground, then respectfully withdrew. After putting the dog on the leash and tying it to a fir-tree, he sat down to wait.

Vorobeitsev spread out the food and uncorked a bottle. They had a drink.

"Ask the German to join us," Chokhov said.

Vorobeitsev seemed not to hear. They had another drink. The sun was climbing higher and higher and the day grew warmer. At first Chokhov kept glancing at his watch, remembering that they had to report at the office, but after the fourth or fifth drink he was sure it was Sunday and they had the whole day at their disposal. He lay on his back and without hearing what Vorobeitsev was saying gazed up at the boundless sky. He forgot all about the German; he even forgot he was in Germany. The sky, clear and cool at this morning hour, reminded him of his home in Novgorod. He got up when Vorobeitsev shook him, but he no longer remembered what it was that had brought him here, and he staggered forward, staring through blurred eyes at the dog dashing back and forth. He heard a shot fired and then another. Then he stumbled into a thicket and lost sight of both Vorobeitsev and the German guide. Struggling through the dense underbrush, he emerged in a glade, flushing a whole brood of partridges. As if fathoming that he was no longer dangerous to them, two hares ran past him one after the other. This angered Chokhov and he stopped; somewhere at the back of his befuddled mind he knew that it was the hares that he had come here for, but it no longer occurred to him that he had a gun slung over his shoulder. Instead he pulled himself up and shouted in his best drill-ground manner:

"Hares, fall in!"

He stood there motionless for a good five minutes, but since no one appeared in response to the command, not even Vorobeitsev, he fell into a heavy trance-like stupor. Gradually he became aware of a cluster of mushrooms down at his feet.

"Mushrooms, fall in!" he barked again.

After some time he executed an about turn and marched off, eventually[1] coming to a field where some local peasants were stacking wheat. Staring at them, he imagined he was back at home and these were collective farmers. His spirits rose and he dropped down against a stack of straw and soon was fast asleep. Vorobeitsev, who had searched for him high and low, shouting and firing into the air, was finally guided to the spot by a German farmer who told him he had seen "a Russian soldier" sleeping in the straw. After considerable shaking Vorobeitsev succeeded in waking Chokhov up.

"What was that vile stuff we drank?" Chokhov asked. The sleep had sobered him somewhat.

Vorobeitsev suggested having another couple of drinks to "clear their heads." The German youth, well laden with hares by then, spread out the blanket once more and produced another bottle.

Chokhov invited the lad to join them and he came over and sat down beside them. They drank a glass each and set out again. Chokhov had a run of good luck from the very first. He shot a hare and the German finished it off with his knife. Chokhov was an excellent marksman and he had an opportunity to exhibit his skill when Vorobeitsev suggested they practise shooting at empty bottles thrown up into the air.

Chokhov, fully confident that it was Sunday, enjoyed the day's hunting in the woods. When dusk came they returned to the village where they had left the car.

"Where could we get a hare roasted around here?"

Vorobeitsev asked a young man who was passing by. He pointed to the manor house. They drove through the wide gates which stood open. The large courtyard was deserted. The house itself loomed darkly beyond. Vorobeitsev went off to reconnoitre, leaving Chokhov and the guide in the car. Presently he returned looking very pleased with himself. "Come on," he said and led the way, glancing back over his shoulder now and again at Chokhov with a look of quivering excitement on his face that reminded Chokhov of a hound on the scent.

They entered a spacious entrance hall in the middle of which stood a stuffed hippopotamus. The walls were hung with paintings and photographs of naked or half-naked Negroes with rings in their noses and ears. From behind the hippopotamus appeared a young man in a leather jacket covered with zip fasteners. With a polite smile he led the two officers into the dining-room, then he and Vorobeitsev went off somewhere, leaving Chokhov alone.

Chokhov went over to the window. It was quite dark now. A faint scent of fading roses wafted through the open window. The light from the window cast a dim coppery glow on the swaying trees outside.

He heard footsteps and turned. Vorobeitsev and the young man re-entered the room, accompanied by a woman dressed in a high-necked black gown. She went up to Chokhov, gave him her hand with a charming smile and introduced herself.

"Liselotte Melchior," she said, dropping the "von."

Chokhov murmured his name and glanced at his companion. Vorobeitsev's face was pale and tense.

An elderly serving woman laid the table and they all sat down. Conversation flagged. Chokhov was amazed at Vorobeitsev's unusual silence. After a few drinks, however, Vorobeitsev became more talkative. He rattled on in broken German, paying little or no heed to gram-

mar. He sat next to Liselotte von Melchior, refilling her glass again and again, gazing at her with bloodshot eyes.

At first the woman spoke little and sat staring at the table-cloth, but after a while she too livened up and, glancing coldly at Vorobeitsev through slightly narrowed eyes, she began to speak. She said that her father had owned a large estate in the Cameroons before the First World War and she had spent some time there as a child. It had been a very large estate, much bigger than the one they had here in Germany. But this one did not belong to them any more either, she added, after a pause. It had been taken over by the Land Department to be parcelled up among the villagers. Her eyes flashed as she said this: for all her self-restraint she could not conceal her emotion.

"Of course wealth isn't everything," she said, smiling at Vorobeitsev.

Then she began to laugh, a pleasant silvery laugh that was most disturbing, gazing provocatively at Vorobeitsev who could not take his eyes off her.

"I don't need so very much," she went on, with a searching, somewhat anxious look at Vorobeitsev. "This house and a few hectares of land would be quite sufficient."

Vorobeitsev who had been eyeing her avidly assumed a stern official look.

"Yes, yes," he said. "That's so.... Quite right. Under certain conditions, of course...."

Chokhov could make nothing of all this, but he felt extremely ill at ease and heartily wished they had not come here. He said something of the kind to Vorobeitsev, but the latter brushed him aside.

"We have a right to eat our own hare, haven't we?" he said irritably. "We'll stay the night and leave early in the morning."

Before long the hare was brought in, beautifully browned and sizzling in fat, which caused Chokhov to reflect that the land reform had evidently not affected the gentry's larder at any rate. Vorobeitsev did not eat anything. Bending over to the lady of the house, he was conversing with her in low tones. At last he got up and said with almost breathless haste:

"It's late. Time for bed. What do you say, Vasya? Bed-time, eh?"

Chokhov rose and went out with Vorobeitsev and the young man in the zipper jacket, who led the way upstairs. Vorobeitsev ran up taking three steps at a time and glancing over his shoulder at Chokhov.

In the dimly lighted room Chokhov undressed and lay down on the wide bed with eiderdowns in place of blankets. Vorobeitsev seemed in no hurry to retire. He smoked a cigarette, came over and bent over Chokhov, then went back to his chair and lit another cigarette. Presently Chokhov heard him get up and go out of the room. After that Chokhov fell asleep. Early the next morning he was awakened by Vorobeitsev already fully dressed. In the grey light of dawn his face looked even paler than usual. He seemed nervous and impatient to leave.

"Hurry up, hurry up, we've got to be going," he kept repeating.

Chokhov dressed quickly and they went outside. The German youth with his dog was already waiting for them beside the car.

"We must hurry," Vorobeitsev said again. He did not look at the house.

As they drove out of the gates, Vorobeitsev suddenly burst out laughing, clicked his tongue and, with a sly look at Chokhov, said, "Not a bad hare that, was it?"

He laughed again and the same moment, as he was turning a corner, ran into a house. The violence of the

jolt dazed Chokhov for a minute or two. He crawled out of the car with difficulty. Fortunately no one was hurt, but the radiator and the right fender were dented. The dog had leapt out of the car and now lay crouched in terror on the ground. The young German, who had been badly shaken, was whimpering a little from the shock.

"Shut up, you!" shouted Vorobeitsev, his face dark with anger.

People came running out of the house. It was amazing how many people lived in this tiny house! There were about eight children alone. It turned out to be the house of a peasant who had taken in a family of refugees.

The car was towed in to a repair shop nearby and Chokhov, Vorobeitsev, the young German, the dog, and the hares were left in the middle of the street, Vorobeitsev cursing under his breath, Chokhov silent and gloomy.

They made their way to the village pub which occupied the ground floor of the local hotel. Finding a table, they sat down and ordered some beer. Every few minutes Vorobeitsev ran down the street to the repair shop to see how things were progressing. Finally he returned looking gloomier than before with the news that the car would have to be towed to town—the damage was too great to be repaired on the spot.

"The boss will have a fit," remarked Vorobeitsev as he sat down at the table. "He'll make it hot for us."

Chokhov first paid no heed to the remark, but suddenly he stared hard at Vorobeitsev and stood up.

"What day is it today?" he asked.

"Saturday."

"Look here," Chokhov said quickly, coming close to Vorobeitsev. "You can't play such jokes on me. What

do you mean, Saturday? Do you know what you said? Do you know what you've done?"

Vorobeitsev drew back slightly.

"In the first place you needn't try to shove all the blame on me." He too got up and began pacing the room nervously. "And for goodness' sake stop acting the Young Pioneer. You're just as much to blame as I am. You can't have it both ways, you know. You can't drink vodka and be Lubentsov's pet too."

Chokhov was about to retort sharply, but he glanced at the German youth sitting in the corner with the shotguns, game pouches and the hares, and changed his mind.

"There's nothing to get worried about," Vorobeitsev said soothingly, going over to Chokhov. "It's not so terrible. Why shouldn't we take a day off once in a while? Too bad about the car, of course, but that was an accident. Might happen to anybody. Even to your precious Lubentsov. We went out hunting at dawn and the car broke down on the way back. And we got stuck. What's so tragic about that?"

Chokhov went outside and stood at the door of the pub, his eyes lowered. He was ashamed to face the peasants passing by on their way to the fields. It seemed to him that they knew he was an idler, guilty of a breach of discipline, and that they looked at him with the scorn with which working folk always regard loafers. Vorobeitsev came out of the pub.

"Come on, Vasya," he wheedled. "Why should you be so scared of your chiefs? All right, we've committed an offence, and I admit I'm more to blame than you are, because I let you in for it. But it's all right, we'll get out of it somehow. And we'll try not to let it happen again."

Chokhov turned away from him and walked out on to the road. Except for the lusty crowing of the cocks,

the village was silent. After a while the children appeared. They came out of the houses, yawning, sleepy-eyed, half-dressed, casting long shadows over the road.

The young German came out of the pub with the dog and the bag of hares. Chokhov stood staring gloomily at the road, waiting for a passing car to give him a lift to town. The village hotel stood on a small hill and he had a good view of the whole main street, which merged about a kilometre away into the highway. He did not look in the opposite direction at all, and so he did not see the two cars drive up to the hotel. It was only when he heard brakes jam on that he turned with a start to see Lubentsov getting out of one of the cars and walking slowly over to the pub.

Chokhov tried not to look at him. He looked at the cars. Through the window of the first he saw Ksenia Spiridonova and Menshov. In the second were Lerche and two other Germans.

Lubentsov went over to the door of the pub, looked at Vorobeitsev, then at the hares and the dog. Then he raised his eyes to Chokhov.

"Stocking up on meat, eh?" he asked.

"Our car broke down," muttered Vorobeitsev.

"No casualties except the hares, I see," said Lubentsov. "All right. Get into the car. The lad will have to go on foot, I'm afraid."

Vorobeitsev got into Lubentsov's car, Chokhov had to sit with the Germans. The cars drove off.

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They turned right on to a narrow country lane and stopped outside one of the cottages. Everyone got out. Chokhov and Vorobeitsev trailed behind the others.

Lerche knocked at the gate and a young woman came out.

"Where's Weller?" Lerche asked her.

"He's not up yet," she replied with a curious glance at the party.

"Wake him up, please," said Lerche.

No one spoke while they waited for Weller to appear. Vorobeitsev smoked one cigarette after another. Menshov called Chokhov aside.

"What happened to you?" he whispered.

Chokhov did not reply. Soon Weller came out. He shook hands all round and waited to hear what was wanted of him.

"Get Reinicke," said Lerche.

The young woman hurried off down the street and came back in a few minutes accompanied by a fair-haired youth with pleasant open features and high cheek-bones.

Chokhov and Vorobeitsev followed the others into the yard. Vorobeitsev assumed such a stern, business-like expression that the young woman looked at him fearfully.

She showed them into a large parlour so stuffed with furniture that there was hardly any room to stand. When they were all seated Lubentsov began talking to Weller and Reinicke. Since he spoke in German, Chokhov understood little of what was being said, but he could see that Lubentsov was angry. Reinicke seemed greatly upset and he kept making helpless gestures. Weller sat silent and gloomy.

Since Lubentsov did not need her services, Ksenia went over to the window which overlooked the courtyard. Chokhov found himself studying her profile—severe, regular and very Russian. The plain blue kerchief she wore over her thick braids was tied at the back—no German woman tied her kerchief like that.

Outside the window a tall maple-tree rustled its yellowing leaves. Ksenia turned her head and her eyes met Chokhov's. They both looked away quickly in confusion.

Lubentsov's voice sounded loud in the quiet room, his tone now stern, now scornful. Now and again he would stop to ask Ksenia for a word or expression. "What is the German for kulak hanger-on?" Or: "How do you say: 'You have given your real intentions away,' or something stronger."

In most cases Ksenia answered very quickly, and when she could not find the exact word she said, "You could explain it this way...."

Presently Lubentsov turned and addressed Reinicke. His voice sounded bitter and reproachful.

"How do you say: 'You've allowed yourselves to be hoodwinked'?" he asked Ksenia, but her answer did not satisfy him. "That's not exactly right." She suggested another phrase.

"That's better," he said and continued the conversation in German.

Later on they drove out to the fields and watched the peasants reaping the harvest; then they looked over the mill, which was badly in need of repair, and returned to the village, stopping for a moment at Reinicke's house. Lubentsov and Lerche talked for a while to Reinicke and then they set out for town.

The nearer they came to town the worse Chokhov felt. Remorse and embarrassment now overwhelmed him.

At last they pulled up at the commandant's office. Chokhov got out of the German car which drove off at once and five minutes later he and Vorobeitsev were standing before Lubentsov in his private office.

"Take a sheet of paper and write an explanation," said Lubentsov.

It was painfully humiliating to be forced to sit down at opposite ends of the table with a pen and a sheet of

foolscap before them, for all the world like two schoolboys who had got into a scrape.

The worst of it was Chokhov had not the slightest idea what to write. He did not know whether to tell the truth or support Vorobeitsev's story—that they had been delayed by the breakdown, which was supposed to have occurred a day earlier than it actually did. But in that case Lubentsov might ask why they hadn't got a lift in some passing car or why they had not telephoned to ask for a car or at least to report the accident.

On the other hand, although he was furious with Vorobeitsev, he had no wish to put the man in a more than embarrassing position by giving a totally different account of what happened. He realized that that might have extremely disastrous consequences for Vorobeitsev, since neither Lubentsov nor Kasatkin would forgive a downright lie.

Vorobeitsev sensed what was going on in Chokhov's mind and made several attempts to catch his eye and make some sign to him. But under the circumstances this was impossible. Vorobeitsev knew that though Lubentsov sat there at his desk apparently engrossed in his papers, the ex-scout's sharp eyes missed nothing. Seeing no other way out, Vorobeitsev decided to take a chance and give his own version of their adventures: they had gone hunting and on the way back to town they had had a smash-up; it had taken some time before they had found a repair shop and ascertained the extent of the damage; the mechanics had at first promised to do the job in a few hours, and they had expected to get back to Lauterburg that same night, but night came and the work was not completed and so they had had to stay overnight in the village; he had nevertheless sent a note to the commandant's office with a passing car, but evidently the note had not been delivered. He had not even mentioned it to Chokhov since the latter

was so upset by the whole affair that they had quarrelled. But he, Vorobeitsev, promised that he would find that car because he had jotted down its number and prove he had done his duty. Moreover, he promised never to let such a thing happen again.

Now and again he looked up from his writing to throw a significant and encouraging glance at Chokhov, but Chokhov did not look at him at all. Nor did he write anything. After about thirty minutes had passed Lubentsov looked up at them. Vorobeitsev sprang up and handed him his "confession." Chokhov remained seated, and when Lubentsov turned to him he said gloomily:

"I'm not going to write anything. I'm guilty and there's the end to it."

"Not going to write?" said Lubentsov in mock anger. "How's that? You were ordered to write, weren't you?"

Chokhov said nothing.

"All right, you may go," said Lubentsov and the two officers went out.

The next morning a soldier came to Chokhov with a summons to appear before the commandant.

Lubentsov was in a hurry; he was about to leave for Fichtenrode on urgent business. Moreover, there was nothing he hated more than to deliver reprimands. But this talk with Chokhov was unavoidable. He noticed with an inward smile of irony at himself that he spoke both convincingly and well—with irony, because he had not hitherto been conscious of this ability to preach to others; it was a faculty he had acquired here in Germany where talking was part—and not the least part—of his job as commandant. Indeed, he did so much talking here that he could deliver a speech at a moment's notice without any preparation and with none of the nervousness he had formerly experienced in addressing meetings. But in spite of the detachment with which he

observed his behaviour and marvelled at his own eloquence, outwardly his manner was grave and thoughtful.

He began by throwing Vorobeitsev's memorandum on the table.

"Have a look at this, Comrade Chokhov," he said in a tone of bitter reproach, "Captain Vorobeitsev cannot even spell properly. You wouldn't think he had had two years of higher school besides his ten years at middle school, would you? But it's not a matter of spelling. The trouble with many of our people—and I'm afraid this applies to yourself as well—is that they are accustomed to taking too much for granted; they expect everything to be served up to them by the state. They don't want to do anything themselves—either work or study. They're accustomed to being spoon-fed. True, our state as distinct from others wants all its citizens to be educated and cultured. But that is impossible unless every individual strives to acquire knowledge himself. Instead of which young men like yourself, Captain Chokhov, know far less than their fathers, who were lucky if they had a chance to attend some miserable parish school. And they got no help from the state in their day. On the contrary. Oh, how I detest those half-baked intellectuals of ours with their superficial knowledge, their utter lack of curiosity, their eternal striving to live at the expense of the most generous state there is! How I detest these morons who have lost contact with the common people, but acquired no wisdom of their own. After all, an officer ought to be an intellectual. Why don't you read books, Chokhov? Why don't you study German? So many great works have been written in that language. Why don't you take a serious interest in what we are doing here? Do you also belong to that category of people who have been so coddled from childhood by Soviet society that they have

forgotten their duty to themselves and to society? Captain Chokhov, you are not doing your duty properly."

While he spoke, Lubentsov saw with an aching heart how Chokhov's face darkened as he listened.

When he had finished there was a long and painful silence. Then Chokhov looked up.

"You are right. I shall try to do what you say. But I'm no good for this sort of work. I can't do it. I told you so from the first."

"Vasily Maximovich! My dear chap!" cried Lubentsov going over to Chokhov. "You can do it! Of course you can! But you must try to understand what it's all about." Lubentsov told himself that it was probably bad policy to soften like this, that no doubt it would have been better to hold out for a day or two so that Chokhov might realize his guilt to the full. That is what many wise chiefs would have done. Yet he felt that he was doing right in this case, for Chokhov was one of those for whom admission of guilt was too painful an ordeal for it to be insincere.

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When Chokhov went out, Lubentsov asked the officer on duty whether Weller had arrived, and was told that the bürgermeister was waiting. Lubentsov put on his cap and went out with Weller to the car.

The "Fleder affair" was still hanging fire and Lubentsov had finally decided to get to the root of the unpleasant business himself.

Although it was a Sunday the Fichtenrode commandant's office presented as bustling a scene of activity as the Lauterburg office. Here, too, people obviously worked all hours. Pigarev, however, was at home, and leaving Weller in the car, Lubentsov went off to find him. He passed under the ivy-covered archway into the

small courtyard, and through the small red door. Inside the house all was quiet. He pushed open another door and saw Pigarev sitting at a table in his trousers and undershirt examining some papers. Kneeling on a chair beside him with her elbows on the table was Albina Tereshchenko. She was looking over his shoulder at the papers before him.

Lubentsov could not believe his eyes. He was so startled that he stepped back and would have fled had Pigarev not turned at the moment and seen him. He, too, was obviously taken aback, but he called out in his usual hearty fashion:

"Well, if it isn't Sergei Platonovich! Come in, come in!"

Albina lazily lowered her legs—she was wearing pyjamas—and turned to look at Lubentsov. Her self-possession was truly amazing, and it would have taken a far more observant person than Lubentsov to notice that she was embarrassed by his sudden appearance.

"Come in, come in," Pigarev repeated, slapping Lubentsov on the back. "Haven't seen you for ages. That darned agrarian question keeps you so busy you've no time for old friends! Sit down, Sergei Platonovich." He glanced at Albina out of the corner of his eye and his face clouded. "I don't suppose I need to introduce you. You know each other well enough. But I might as well tell you—she's my wife." He glanced at Lubentsov, frowning, and there was a furtive, defiant look in his eyes Lubentsov had not seen there before.

The truth was that Pigarev was jealous of Lubentsov. He was certain that there had been something between him and Albina in Lauterburg. He was jealous because although he loved her as perhaps he had never loved anyone before, he did not trust her. In fact he had no illusions whatever about her, and yet in spite of this, or, curiously enough, because of it, he loved her.

Lubentsov, of course, knew nothing of all this, but he was conscious of a discordant note in the conversation and he hastened to explain his business to Pigarev, for he was anxious to begin the investigation at once. However, Albina, who had completely recovered her composure by now, intervened to beg Lubentsov in her caressing voice to stay if only for half an hour and have lunch with them. Under the circumstances Lubentsov could not refuse, and they sat down.

"I hear that Ksenia Spiridonova is your interpreter now," Albina remarked as she set the table. "Sour-faced creature. I can't stand her. You can never get a word out of her. I don't think she knows much German either. She worked at a factory. I doubt whether she can even read the language."

"Oh no," objected Lubentsov, not quite sure what tone to take with Albina now that she was his comrade's wife. "She tries very hard."

"Well, you'll never find anyone to equal Albina," said Pigarev. "She's smart enough to be commandant herself. Knows everything. But you needn't think I lured her away from you. It just turned out that way."

There were drinks too. Time passed. Lubentsov was impatient to get this unnecessary lunch over and done with, but it was impossible for him to get up and go. He knew that the "newly-weds" would be bound to take offence. Pigarev would take it as a sign that Lubentsov looked on his marriage as something shameful and scandalous, as in his heart of hearts Pigarev knew it to be. Albina, for her part, would be convinced that Lubentsov disapproved of his comrade's action in marrying a girl who had lived in Germany for several years doing God knows what. All this created a complicated tangle of emotions, an undercurrent of wounded pride, veiled hints and tense watchfulness that Lubentsov

found almost unendurable. Added to this was his impatience at having to waste so much precious time.

As he sat there exchanging small talk with Albina and Pigarev, Lubentsov was thinking that Pigarev, so far as he knew, had a wife back home and that no doubt Pigarev had not even written to her about his marriage with Albina. Lubentsov's sympathies were wholly on the side of that wife in Russia, not because of any puritanical notions about divorce, but because Pigarev's new wife was Albina whom he instinctively disliked.

To make matters worse he soon noticed that Albina—under the influence of the wine perhaps—was gazing at him in much the same adoring fashion as she had when she was his interpreter in Lauterburg, and that her voice when she addressed him had that soft, purring, insinuating quality he remembered so well.

When the telephone rang in the next room and Pigarev went out to answer it, Albina moved closer to Lubentsov.

"Aren't you sorry I went away?" she cooed.

Lubentsov decided to make a joke of it. "On the contrary. I should think you would find it much pleasanter to be a wife than an interpreter."

"One can be both at the same time," said Albina, adding in a low, challenging voice, "I didn't want to leave you. I think of you even now. Very often."

Pigarev, who came back at that moment, glanced suspiciously at them.

"All right," he said curtly. "Let's go."

He dressed quickly and went out with Lubentsov.

"Well, there it is," said Pigarev after a few minutes of silence. Then looking straight at Lubentsov, he fired at him point-blank, "I see you're displeased about something? You disapprove of me, is that it?" Without waiting for an answer, he went on, "I have enough of

that sort of thing without you! The Political Department had me on the carpet a few days ago. I can't help it. I love her, and no one can forbid me to. As for Varya, we weren't even married officially. So I haven't any obligation to her at all."

"Besides she's far away and this one is here," observed Lubentsov, but wishing to avoid any useless arguments, he added hastily, "It's your own affair, of course. And let's not discuss it."

"No, I want to discuss it," Pigarev said, losing his temper. "Look here, you're my friend, I value your opinion. But you don't approve of this thing either. Don't deny it, I'm not blind. But why do you disapprove? Can you answer that?..." He gave a dry laugh. "Albina has a very high opinion of you, by the way. She says you're a much better commandant than I am."

By this time they had reached the office and Pigarev was obliged to drop the subject. The sentry presented arms. Inside the spacious hall a captain stepped up and reported briefly. They went upstairs to Pigarev's private office. Pigarev pressed a button, shouting: "Benevolensky!"

The sergeant in spectacles entered the room.

"Tell Petrov I want him. And get the Landrat at once."

Petrov, the officer in charge of agriculture, came in, and Lubentsov put the matter before him.

"I'll look into it," he said briefly and went out.

Five minutes later the Landrat, a fat, jolly-looking man, arrived. Pigarev's manner towards him was blunt and imperious, and it was clear that the Landrat stood in awe of him. That Landrat wouldn't dare shout at Pigarev, the way Sebastian shouts at me, Lubentsov thought to himself. I suppose I *am* a bit of a liberal.

They all drove over to the Landrat's office and spent a good two hours going over the *Grundbuch,* but

found nothing. The official in charge was ingratiatingly polite but not over-zealous. When Pigarev shouted at him, he blinked and said mildly, "I'm sorry, Herr Kommandant, there is no record of it."

"How can that be," Petrov interposed. "Didn't you tell me about some property just the other day? What was the name now? Fluder, or Flader.... A woman, remember? A stout woman. In Birkenhausen, if I'm not mistaken."

"Let's go to Birkenhausen," said Lubentsov grimly.

At Birkenhausen the whole affair was cleared up with miraculous speed. What from a distance and from reports at second and third hand had appeared to be a complex tangle proved on the spot to be very simply explained. Sure enough, Fleder owned a property here of some eighty hectares. The whole village knew about it. Frau Molder, who was Fleder's sister-in-law, a stout, amiable woman, did not particularly try to hide the fact. She received the Soviet officers and local government officials very cordially and answered their questions with a malicious pleasure that suggested there was not much love lost between her and her brother-in-law.

She told them that Fleder also owned a large tract of forest land in Mecklenburg, not far from the town of Greifswald.

Lubentsov was dumbfounded. He telephoned Kasatkin and told him that he would not be back that day, and without further ado set out with Weller by car for Greifswald. He could not help chuckling when he pictured himself telling all this to old Sebastian.

It was a long drive to Greifswald. As a matter of fact, according to regulations Lubentsov ought to have obtained special permission from SMAG for this trip, but he wanted to save time. Armut kept up a steady 100 kilometres an hour. The roads were in excellent condition, and there was little traffic.

Stretches of uncultivated fields, woods and villages flashed past in rapid succession. Occasionally they met a few cars and farm carts going in the opposite direction. Lubentsov consulted his map now and again, but that unerring instinct acquired in the army for choosing the right road kept them from straying off their path. The spreading plain lay basking in the rays of a warm autumn sun. Gradually Lubentsov settled down to quiet enjoyment of the long drive, while his thoughts continued to dwell on the business that had brought him here. For instance, he thought what a good thing it would be for the peasants and farm-hands that Fleder, that soft-spoken gentleman who posed so skilfully as a kind and generous friend of the people, had been exposed as a fraud. Now and again Lubentsov would find himself thinking of Tanya and from time to time these memories and reflections, at once sweet and bitter, would be invaded by more tangible and hence more dangerous thoughts associated with the delicate face, the slender figure and the golden hair of Erika Sebastian.

At these thoughts Lubentsov would frown, and in an effort to drive them away, he would strike up a conversation with Armut or Weller. But soon after he would lapse again into silence, and again the confused pattern of ideas and images would take possession of his mind to the accompaniment of the throb of the engine and the gentle rocking of the car.

Looking at Armut he thought of Ivan. Most likely he would never see Ivan again, for he came under the new demobilization law which had been adopted the other day by the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

Weller, noticing that the commandant was not in a mood for talking, also said little, the more so since he felt rather guilty about that Fleder affair. He realized that he had been inexcusably gullible. To say the truth, until today's revelations he, too, had thought very highly

of Fleder. He had regarded him as his closest assistant in the matter of carrying out the land reform, and had relied on Fleder's influence among the peasants, who considered him an ardent champion of democratic reform. Now Weller could not help admiring the persistence and farsightedness of the commandant and Lerche's steadfast adherence to principle, and he vowed that in future he would try to follow their example.

Armut was as silent as he always was when driving. He was very conscious of his responsibility for the life of the Soviet commandant and for the success of this journey of whose purpose he knew little except that it must be important since the commandant believed it to be so. The only thing that worried him at the moment was that he believed his present job was only temporary, for he did not know yet that Ivan would not return.

They travelled thus, each occupied with his own thoughts, yet all three bound together not only by the fact that they were riding in the same car but by a multitude of other invisible ties, feelings and interests.

After about three hours Lubentsov began to feel hungry and he heartily wished he had remembered to take some food with him. Presently the appetizing smell of cold roast beef reached him, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Weller take a small parcel from his coat pocket, open it up and pick out a meat sandwich. Weller then wrapped the parcel up again, returned it to his pocket, and proceeded to eat with quiet dignity. When he had eaten the sandwich he leaned back against the seat and dozed off.

As for Lubentsov, the gnawing pangs of hunger grew increasingly acute and he found his thoughts returning again and again to the neat package in Weller's coat pocket. Weller, however, suspecting nothing, sat comfortably, now dozing a while, now waking up with a

yawn and looking out of the window. About an hour and a half later he again reached for the package. Lubentsov, though he sat with his back to him, literally felt what was happening and waited tensely alert while Weller took out another sandwich, this time with a large sausage split down the middle, wrapped the package up neatly as before, put it back in his pocket and settled down to eat the sandwich, looking out of the window while he munched it.

Lubentsov was conscious of every movement Weller made, and every movement evoked in him a feeling akin to hatred.

Presently they reached a rather big town. Lubentsov asked a passer-by to direct them to the Soviet commandant's office and they drove straight there. The lieutenant on duty gave Lubentsov a chit to the officers' mess and a young soldier to act as a guide. In the officers' mess a Russian waitress brought Lubentsov and his two companions plates of steaming hot cabbage soup, meat cutlets with buckwheat *kasha* and a dessert of lukewarm stewed fruit—all three courses at once. Lubentsov took a vicious pleasure in pressing food on Weller, plying him with bread, tomatoes and cucumbers. His feeling of animosity towards Weller was gone, it had been replaced by a gratifying sense of superiority mingled with amused surprise. He laughed to himself at the thought that this dinner in the Soviet officers' mess would be a good object-lesson in comradeship for Weller.

Lubentsov paid for the meal, and went outside to join Weller and Armut. After Armut had refilled the tank with petrol they all got in and drove off. The town was quickly left behind and soon they were driving through fields and woods, past tile-roofed cottages and meadows with herds of grazing sheep and cows. Lubentsov glanced at his map in alarm. It was still two hundred kilometres to Greifswald, and although they were mak-

ing good speed, they could not average more than sixty to seventy kilometres an hour, taking into account the occasional stops and slowing down for towns and villages. Even if the possibility of unforeseen delays was excluded they would not get to Greifswald before nightfall, which meant that nothing would be done until the next morning. But it was impossible to tell how long the business would take.

"*Davai, davai,*" Lubentsov kept urging Armut.

Gradually daylight waned. The cattle began coming home from the fields, jamming the road and making progress difficult. Armut blew his horn continuously, but with little effect.

Before long, darkness fell and Armut switched on the headlights. The road grew more and more deserted. Unexpectedly one of the back tyres blew out and they had to stop while Armut changed the wheel. After he had checked the oil and refilled the tank they went on again. Soon Lubentsov heard the familiar rustling of paper behind him. Weller unwrapped his package, took out another sandwich, wrapped up the remainder and proceeded to masticate with slow deliberation.

Lubentsov snorted and drummed his fingers on the arm of his seat. He longed to say something insulting to Weller. He had an irresistible desire to snatch the sandwich out of his hands and fling it out of the window. But he controlled the impulse, and sat grimly silent for the remainder of the journey.

Greifswald turned out to be a charming old seaside town which had completely escaped war damage. It had many fine buildings, cosy little squares and shady streets. A fresh breeze from the sea rustled the abundant foliage. Lubentsov, however, had little time to enjoy the scenery. When the local commandant, a colonel, learned what had brought Lubentsov here, he got busy at once. He, too, was interested in getting to the

bottom of this affair inasmuch as Fleder's land was registered here under another name. Late as it was, the colonel summoned the registrar, an energetic young man, a former peasant and a member of the Communist Party, who suggested that they drive out to the place at once.

They had a quick supper in a little restaurant opposite the commandant's office which served as officers' mess for the Soviet army unit stationed in the town. Lubentsov again urged Weller to eat.

"Have a good meal while you can, Weller," he said. "You might get hungry on the road."

Weller nodded complacently, thanked him and ate twice as much as anyone else.

Lubentsov paid for the supper and they drove out to Herr Fleder's forest property.

As might have been expected, the old man in charge of the property turned out to be a cover for the real owner. When pressed by Lubentsov and Weller, he finally admitted that the property belonged to Fleder.

The next morning Lubentsov started back armed with all the necessary papers. This time he took the precaution of taking along enough food to last all of them the entire trip.

As they were approaching the Harz, Lubentsov suddenly turned to Weller and said, "Excuse me, Weller, I am a foreigner here and hence I am ignorant of many of the customs of your country. Tell me, is it customary here not to share one's food with one's fellow-travellers who have forgotten to take anything with them?"

Weller blushed furiously. No, he said, it wasn't exactly the custom—it would be wrong to say that it was; but it was done nevertheless. As a matter of fact, you sometimes took your own food with you even when you went visiting, or, if you were going to stay with relatives for a few days, you sent them some money be-

forehand, calculated at so much per day. Even in times of prosperity this had been more or less the rule. It was thrift, he said with an awkward laugh, a national German trait.

"German?" echoed Lubentsov. "I doubt it. Isn't it rather a petty-bourgeois trait? Never mind, Weller, I'm just thinking aloud."

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Lubentsov got back to the commandant's office weary but elated. He called in Kasatkin and Menshov at once and told them what he had accomplished on the trip. They were delighted. Menshov actually flushed with pleasure.

"Where's Chokhov?" Lubentsov asked.

"He's here," replied Kasatkin.

"How have he and Vorobeitsev been behaving?"

"Quite all right, so far. They're trying to make amends."

"Call Chokhov, please."

"Vasily Maximovich," Lubentsov said when Chokhov appeared. "Come over to my place and have supper with me. Get Voronin to come too if he has nothing else to do. We'll chew the rag about the old times back in the regiment."

When Lubentsov and his guests got to the house they met Sebastian at the door.

"I would like to speak to you," he said to Lubentsov.

"Come in, please."

As Sebastian entered the house, Lubentsov noticed with some surprise that the Landrat was dressed up—he had on a long tail coat, white starched cuffs and patent leather shoes. Voronin whistled softly at the sight.

"I am still angry with you and would not have come if my daughter had not insisted," the professor said

candidly. "It is her birthday today. She invited you some time ago."

"Thank you," said Lubentsov and added slyly, "Why are you angry with me, Professor? You have no reason to be, you know...."

Sebastian waved his hand. "I beg you, not today! Let us declare a truce for the evening. Very well then, we are expecting you." And with these words he left.

"Can't be helped, I suppose," said Lubentsov in despair. "Too bad. Just when we had planned such a pleasant evening together. But there's nothing to be done. Drat the old man! He doesn't want to talk business, but he can't understand that for me his daughter's birthday party is not a pleasure but business, and damn difficult business at that! Especially at a time like this, when the Landrat ought to be attending to more important things than birthday parties...."

"What about a present?" Voronin interposed.

"A present! Oh, damn it all!"

"I'll take care of that," said Voronin and hurried out to look for Kranz.

"Shall I go in civilian clothes?" Lubentsov asked Chokhov. The latter could not even imagine Lubentsov in anything but uniform. He did not care for civilian clothes in general, they were too shapeless for his taste. But on thinking it over he decided it might be better for Lubentsov to go to the party in mufti to emphasize that he was there unofficially.

Lubentsov went to the wardrobe and took out his new suit.

"I owe this to Albina," he said.

When he put it on Chokhov could scarcely recognize him, so little did this tall, fair-haired young man resemble Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov. He had to admit that civilian clothes suited Lubentsov. The jacket need-

ed pressing though. They found an electric iron and Chokhov undertook to do the pressing himself. At that point they discovered that Lubentsov had no shoes to go with the suit, his army top-boots being obviously unsuitable. Chokhov owned a pair of shoes he sometimes wore with his uniform, and since he and Lubentsov wore the same size, he ran to get them. He returned with the boots, but there still remained the question of the tie. Lubentsov confessed that he had never worn a tie in his life. It was Voronin who now came to the rescue. He rushed in, his arms full of parcels.

Chokhov plugged in the electric iron and went to see what Voronin had brought.

Voronin unwrapped his trophies: three pairs of stockings in cellophane packages, three bottles of perfume ("the best French stuff to be had"), and three bottles of liqueur ("local stuff, is that all right?").

"I'm sure they'd rather have tinned food," muttered Lubentsov. "They're not too well off. Our Landrat, whatever you may say of him, isn't a grabber."

He ruled out the stockings at once. He considered a gift like that highly improper. The perfume was more appropriate, and after some consideration he decided to take the liqueur along and slip it to Frau Weber in the hall.

"Flowers would be best," Chokhov said.

"Oh, they've got plenty of flowers," Voronin objected. "Besides, what's the good of flowers. They fade and then you have to throw them out."

"What shall I do about a tie?" Lubentsov asked absently.

"A tie? Just a minute," said Voronin and hurried outside again. His flashlight ran over the figure of Kranz standing in the darkness and came to rest on his tie.

"Not much of a tie," he said.

"I can bring you another," Kranz offered.

"No time."

Kranz took off his tie and handed it to Voronin.

"You'll get it back tomorrow," said Voronin. "Here, take back the stockings. Wouldn't have 'em."

Kranz protested that it was perfectly proper to make a gift of stockings, that they were very hard to get nowadays and there was nothing a lady would appreciate more than a pair of good stockings.

"He won't have them," said Voronin. "Wait here a minute and I'll bring you the money for the liqueur and the perfume."

He went back into the house, quickly knotted the tie for Lubentsov and asked for the money.

Lubentsov gave him a handful of marks, and walked up to the professor's house feeling extremely uncomfortable in his new clothes. It was raining and he walked as quickly as he could, for he had no civilian overcoat to go with the suit. Reaching the house he rang the bell, inwardly cursing the whole business.

Some thirty guests were assembled when Lubentsov, having thrust his gifts into Frau Weber's hands, entered the large drawing-room. No one noticed him come in for the entire company, seated on chairs, settees and couches, was listening to a young girl playing the piano. Moreover, many of the guests did not know Lubentsov and those who did failed to recognize him in his civilian suit. Erika turned her head and looked at him narrowly for about half a minute before a smile of recognition lit up her face. She rose noiselessly, tiptoed over to him and pressed his hand. The girl went on playing. Erika stood beside Lubentsov regarding him with silent admiration. He began to feel uncomfortable under her scrutiny.

"Congratulations," he whispered.

"I hardly recognized you at first," she whispered back.

The girl finished playing. Everyone applauded and begged her to play some more. Erika continued to stand beside Lubentsov. Presently she was called away and she left him with obvious reluctance.

With a sense of relief Lubentsov found himself a seat and surveyed the gathering.

He recognized President Rüdiger sitting in an armchair beside his wife, a stout, hard-faced old lady who looked remarkably like her husband. Sebastian sat on one side of them and the lean, thoughtful Klaustal on the other. Next to the pastor was a man in faultless evening dress with a shiny bald head. Over on the sofa were three old gentlemen of extremely intellectual appearance. On Sebastian's left stood ex-bürgermeister Seelenbach looking like an owl in his huge horn-rimmed spectacles. He was leaning his elbow on the back of the sofa where his plump wife and two daughters were seated. Minden, the proprietor of a book-shop, a colourless man who wore glasses with double lenses, was perched on a chair in the corner near the piano, and nearby stood the elegant Hugo Mauritius with his little, delicate-looking blonde wife.

On a small couch behind this group was Frau Lüttwitz smoking a cigarette. Two stout gentlemen in evening dress were sitting beside her.

The guests were gazing blankly before them with an expression of studied concentration, as if something interesting was hidden from their view by those in front of them and they had resigned themselves to waiting patiently until the others had moved away. They were listening to music.

Lubentsov turned his attention to Sebastian. The professor looked very handsome in his dress suit. His large dark eyes seemed a little sad at the moment—because

of the music, perhaps—and his straight white hair was slightly disarrayed, and this in contrast to the smooth and pomaded heads of the other men present caused Lubenstov to feel a sudden wave of tenderness for the old man. For the first time he was seeing Sebastian not as a Landrat or a professor, but as a man among men. And he decided that Sebastian was indeed a man of very distinguished appearance, an outstanding personality without doubt.

Having come to this conclusion, Lubentsov turned to examine another large group sitting on the other side of the piano.

These were mostly young people: carefully dressed young men with smooth hair and tight-fitting jackets, and demure young girls pink-cheeked with suppressed excitement. The only elderly person in this group was Erich Grellman. He was dressed in a loose-fitting brown suit, and obviously cared nothing for the music, for he was carrying on a whispered conversation with a lady in a long cherry-coloured gown in whom Lubentsov was surprised to recognize Liselotte von Melchior.

He saw several other people whom he knew—Vorländer, Jost and the Communist worker Wisetzki who was in charge of labour problems. Lubentsov was glad to see them here. He thought of them as the "Left backbenchers" in this rather mixed company.

Wisetzki had brought his wife, a young working girl neatly but plainly dressed, who surveyed the gathering with a glint of amusement in her bright blue eyes. Lubentsov was delighted to see that this ordinary working girl was not the least overawed by her introduction to "high society." He told himself that when the workers took over power in this country, this young woman, when occasion demanded, would be able to play hostess to the most distinguished guests with quiet dignity. He automatically reached for his notebook to

jot down Frau Wisetzki's name for future reference, but caught himself in time.

He was glad to see that although Sebastian had invited the "upper circle" of Lauterburg society, as had evidently been his custom in previous years, he had not neglected his new friends and fellow-workers. This in itself was a definite sign of progress, although politically he was still "sitting on the fence."

Looking at Sebastian, Lubentsov had difficulty in suppressing a smile when he thought of his recent trip. He was just toying with the idea of going right up to the professor and coming out with the whole story of the "honest Fleder" and his secret possessions in Birkenhausen and Greifswald when his eye fell on the gentleman with the shining bald pate sitting next to Klaustal. With a start he saw that it was none other than Fleder himself. Lubentsov had not recognized him at once evidently because he had never seen him before in evening clothes or without a hat.

Well, well, this is certainly a cross-section of the whole Lauterburg district, he thought to himself grimly.

The "honest Fleder" appeared to feel ill at ease in this society. He kept fidgeting in his chair and throwing guilty looks at Rüdiger and Sebastian. The music obviously held no interest for him and he tried in vain to assume the dreamy, absorbed look which he believed to be proper for the occasion.

At last the girl finished playing. The guests rose and wandered off to form small groups. The room soon hummed with conversation. Erika had reappeared and now moved from one group to another, her laughter echoing now in one corner of the room, now in another. Lubentsov watched her with a faint frown.

By now many of the guests had recognized the commandant, and the news of his presence spread quickly about the room. To his surprise, however, no one ap-

peared to be in any way disconcerted by the fact. If they happened to pass near him they bowed politely and continued their conversation. This pleased him for it was a great relief not to be the centre of attention for once, not to have to talk and try to convince anyone. On the other hand, he was conscious that a part of him resented it for the very reason that he was already accustomed to being the centre of attention and he had secretly believed that his coming would create a sensation. He could not help smiling to himself at these conflicting emotions.

He continued to watch Erika from a distance. He noticed that she, too, was conscious of his presence. Once or twice their eyes met and they both turned away instantly.

Fleder was having a lively discussion with Rüdiger and Sebastian. Lubentsov saw Sebastian patting his shoulder benevolently—evidently praising him for his philanthropic undertakings. Lubentsov smiled, got up and strolled off to mingle with the guests.

He moved from group to group, catching snatches of conversation, and the more he heard the more amazed he was. Not a word was said about the epoch-making political developments now taking place in Germany. It was as if they did not exist at all.

One group was discussing religion.

"Protestantism is a denial of the very idea of God," one old man who had been introduced to Lubentsov as a Doctor of Philosophy was saying in a voice of suppressed passion. "By making the Bible the foundation of faith Luther substituted the word for the Deity. The rude legends of a primitive tribe challenged Revelation, which requires no substantiation."

Elsewhere the youth were discussing sport topics with great zest. One young man was describing a trip he had taken to Scandinavia before the war and a skating

contest he had seen while there. A plump girl rolling her large mild blue eyes spoke breathlessly of slalom.

In another group of which Frau Lüttwitz was the centre the talk was of fashions, specifically the latest American fashion magazines she had received from friends in the West.

Lubentsov listened to all this with a growing feeling of consternation and dismay. What was it, indifference or weariness? Complete unconcern or hidden animosity? Perhaps they simply wished to forget, to keep their minds off those vital problems on which their future depended? Or were they content to let someone else think for them?

He, Lubentsov, was obliged to concern himself with far more immediate and important matters than the "Revelation,"—such as improving the food supply for the German population, for example, increasing the bread and meat rations, manufacturing fertilizers for the fields, providing seed grain, restarting factories, effecting a just redistribution of the land.

He had a fierce hatred for idlers and parasites, people who always contrived to sit on the fence, "neutrals" as he contemptuously called them. Yet he felt sorry for them all, young and old—all excepting the Lüttwitzes and Fleders, of course—bound as they were so strongly to the past and so ill-adapted to the present and the new life it had brought. At the same time he could not help thinking how curious it was that great social upheavals, which, when they have become part of history, are seen as events that must have gripped the imagination of all contemporaries, in reality inspire by no means everyone. At the very time when these great things are taking place a great many people go about their petty, everyday affairs with no thought for anything outside their immediate range of vision. And Lubentsov wondered whether it might not be that one of the car-

dinal issues of the century was a struggle between the two opposing camps for possession of the soul of the philistine, whose name was legion. What made that struggle so difficult was that the philistine by his very nature inclined towards capitalism.

But is that really so? he thought, studying the faces of the people around him with eager curiosity. Is it not possible, given a wise and correct policy, to convince them of the advantages of the new way of life, the new human relations, as compared with the old and moribund mode of existence? And he told himself with deep conviction that however difficult it might be it was nevertheless possible.

He got up and went over to the "left back-benchers."

18

Here the atmosphere was different. Vorländer was discussing with Jost the need to unite the two workers' parties in one large and powerful Marxist party. Both agreed that the time was ripe for such action. Wisetzki stood by listening with an enigmatic smile.

"Our Lerche will rebel," he said at length. There was a shade of irony in his tone, although the words "our Lerche" had an affectionate ring.

Frau Wisetzki turned to Lubentsov.

"Aren't you tired of being here?" she asked.

"It's awkward to leave so soon," he replied. "Besides, I find much of it most interesting."

"Oh yes," she agreed with a laugh. "It fairly reeks of last century, doesn't it? But I've had enough of these fine folk, all gloss outside and nothing inside. Coming, Rheingold?" she said to her husband.

"Don't go," Lubentsov begged her. "It will be terribly dull without you."

At that moment a faint ripple of applause sounded behind them. Liselotte von Melchior was going over to the piano. The professor was not very discriminating in his choice of friends, Lubentsov thought ruefully. But Liselotte began to play, and in a few moments Lubentsov found himself listening with increasing attention.

Music always induced in him a mood of quiet melancholy, evoking memories of woodland glades, shining lakes and rivers, visions cherished from childhood. Frau Melchior was an accomplished musician—at any rate all conversation had abruptly ceased and everyone appeared to be listening with much enjoyment. Fleder alone continued to fidget and stare about him. As he listened to the wistful melancholy music flowing from Liselotte's fingers, Lubentsov told himself that surely there could be no evil thoughts or actions where music like this existed. He found himself scanning the faces of the listeners and discovering with naive distress that alas, music did not change people. Fleder was still Fleder, Frau Lüttwitz was still the grasping factory-owner, Seelenbach remained a shopkeeper, and even Liselotte von Melchior who played so beautifully continued to cling with bulldog tenacity to her property.

Just then his eye fell on Erika sitting at the other end of the room. She had evidently been looking at him, and when their eyes met she did not turn away, but continued to gaze steadily at him. A faint shiver went through him.

Liselotte finished playing, and the whole company moved towards the dining-room. Lubentsov was about to follow suit, when Erika suddenly appeared at his side and asked him if he could spare her a few minutes. Lubentsov nodded and followed her down the hall to a small, semi-dark room. As they entered someone came forward out of the shadows. It was Frau Melchior.

"I believe you have met before," said Erika with a forced smile."Forgive me for taking you away from the

company, Herr Lubentsov, but Frau Melchior begged me to. . . ."

With a murmured apology she hastily withdrew.

Frau Melchior, very pale and very beautiful in her cherry-coloured gown, stood silent for a moment or two as if undecided how to begin.

"I did not recognize you at first, Herr Lubentsov," she said at last. "But when I did I asked Fraülein Erika. . . . Has your assistant told you . . . about me?"

"My assistant?" Lubentsov asked in surprise.

Her eyes widened for a moment, then narrowed sharply.

"So he has not spoken to you?" she said in a flat voice.

"No. What about?"

"You see," she began again after a brief silence. "All I ask is to be allowed to keep the house and five hectares of land. . . . Just like the peasants. . . . I will work . . . like an ordinary peasant. I can do it. Besides, I can learn."

"Frau Melchior," said Lubentsov. "What you ask is impossible, and for many reasons, one of them being that we cannot make exceptions for anyone. Surely you understand that. I cannot even sympathize with you because I am firmly convinced that what we are doing is right and necessary."

She stood for a minute or two in silence.

"You speak German very well," she said at last, and her clenched hands relaxed.

"Permit me to return the compliment," said Lubentsov. "You play the piano beautifully. An accomplished musician like yourself need not worry about the future or long for five hectares of land. . . . Shall we rejoin the others?"

"You go, Herr Lubentsov. I shall stay here for a while."

He went out of the room. The drawing-room was empty. Good chance to escape, he thought and was about to act on the impulse when the door opened and Captain Vorobeitsev in his uniform with a row of medals on his chest walked in, carrying a bouquet of flowers and a small parcel. He glanced absently at Lubentsov, but did not recognize him in his civilian outfit. At that moment the door of the dining-room opened and Frau Weber appeared. She greeted Vorobeitsev and ushered him into the dining-room. Lubentsov was again contemplating flight when Sebastian came out of the dining-room and saw him.

"Ah, there you are!" he said. "Come and have supper."

"Herr Professor, you must excuse me, but I'm afraid I must be leaving. Work, you know...."

"Oh no," Sebastian protested. "Erika will be offended. And the guests too...." He smiled slyly. "They are much flattered by your presence at this little party of mine. That is also good for our work, don't you think?"

Lubentsov frowned, but meekly followed Sebastian into the dining-room.

The festivities were at their height, and the room was noisy. The hum of conversation grew steadily louder. Lubentsov sat down in the place reserved for him between Rüdiger's wife and Vorländer. He looked about for Vorobeitsev and saw him sitting at the other end of the table surveying the scene and looking very important between two young girls.

Presently the door opened softly and Frau Melchior came in. She noticed Vorobeitsev as soon as she entered the room and she blanched. Erika went over to her and after a brief whispered conversation they left the room together. A few minutes later Erika returned alone. She gave Lubentsov a long, searching look and resumed her seat at the table. Frau Melchior did not reappear.

Fleder, who had had a good deal to drink, lost his former restraint and began talking in a loud, hearty voice. From time to time he addressed Lubentsov across the table, inviting him to come and spend a few days with him at his country home and extolling the quality of his cream, his pork and pears.

"Your health, Herr Kommandant," he exclaimed.

The toast reached Vorobeitsev's ears at the very moment when he had discarded his stiff manner and was whispering playfully to his neighbours. He stopped short and stared incredulously at Lubentsov. Emitting a low whistle of surprise he stood up, straightened his tunic and made his way over to the commandant.

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," he said in a low voice, "I was invited and it was awkward to refuse."

Lubentsov personally saw no harm in Vorobeitsev's accepting an invitation to such an affair. His officers had to associate with the Germans all the time, and it was unreasonable, if not impossible, to restrict such association. But he knew, too, that some of the chiefs at SMAG did not share this view and so he said:

"You ought to have let me or Major Kasatkin know about it in advance."

"I shan't let it happen again," said Vorobeitsev.

He went back to his seat greatly relieved at having been let off so lightly. But his self-confidence was gone and shortly afterwards he took his leave.

Lubentsov, too, had decided to leave. He winked to the "left back-benchers" and got a nod of understanding from Frau Wisetzki.

But once again he was detained, this time by Erich Grellman, the Christian Democrat leader who had stared at him gloomily throughout the supper.

"I want to have a frank talk with you," he said, and indicating a chair sat down opposite Lubentsov and began in his slow, weighty fashion, "I am afraid that our

Left-wingers do not know what they are doing. They're leading Germany to famine, to a chronic shortage of agricultural produce. Look here, Herr Kommandant, in the Soviet Union, when experience showed that small-scale farming was unprofitable, you replaced it with large-scale farming, right? But our Left-wingers want to divide the big farms into small allotments of a few hectares and parcel them out to many owners, which is bound to lead to the ruination of our agriculture."

"You are appealing to the wrong quarters," said Lubentsov coldly. "I have no say in the matter. You ought to take your complaint much higher. The more so since, as you know yourself, the initiative in this matter does not belong to the Military Administration; it comes from the two democratic parties."

"Oh, I know all about that," said Grellman with a careless wave of his hand. "I also know that neither of these two parties would have taken any initiative unless it had the backing of the Military Administration. Now look here, Herr Kommandant!" he went on earnestly after a brief pause. "I have a very high opinion of your intelligence, your energy, and also your sense of justice. That is why I am taking the liberty of stating my opinion frankly without fear of the consequences. And it is just because I respect you personally and because I have nothing against the Soviet occupation authorities either that I consider it my duty to state my views, which I may say are shared by others."

"I appreciate your frankness," Lubentsov said. "Permit me also to be quite frank. Your party has more than a hundred landowners from Lauterburg district among its members. Besides these landowners it also has a few hundred peasants. Some of the peasants have no land at all. Are you speaking on their behalf too? Or do you think that they have no opinion of their own or that they are perhaps incapable of expressing any opinion?

I am afraid you are gravely mistaken. I have talked to hundreds of peasants since I began working here. I'm not boasting about it because it is my business to talk to people. Incidentally, I happen to know that you have not talked to people. You are not interested in what the peasants think because you're afraid that they might not support you, you're afraid they would lose confidence in you because their interests are the exact opposite to yours. And so you confine yourself to talking with the landowners. Last Saturday you visited Waldau, on Wednesday you were at the von Melchiors'. And so on. I do not doubt your sincerity, but I repeat that you are appealing to the wrong quarters."

"Perhaps," said Grellman. There was the hint of a threat behind his politeness.

"There's no perhaps about it," replied Lubentsov and walked out of the room. The gramophone was playing in the drawing-room, and the young people were dancing. He found the "Left-wingers" waiting for him at the door.

"Come, let's hurry," Lubentsov whispered and opened the door. At that moment Fleder who was standing nearby in lively discussion with Sebastian called to him.

"You're not going surely?" he inquired with an amiable smile. "Work, I suppose? Dear me, when will you rest? You can't always be working, you know."

Sebastian was smiling benevolently at Fleder.

"He is inviting us to spend a few days at his place," he said. "We really could not find a pleasanter place to relax. Herr Fleder is a great angler and sportsman, you know."

"He's inviting us, is he?" said Lubentsov, turning with a frown to Fleder. "To which of your estates are you inviting us, Herr Fleder? To Birkenhausen or Greifswald? They are both fine places. I was there yesterday. By the way, Frau Molder sends you her regards, so does old Lanke. I wanted to tell you before, but Herr Sebas-

tian has kept you all to himself all evening. He has such a high opinion of his 'honest' Fleder."

With these words Lubentsov turned on his heel and walked out of the drawing-room leaving the trembling Fleder and the bewildered Sebastian to stare helplessly at each other. But Sebastian quickly recovered himself and hurried out after Lubentsov. He caught up with him just as he was saying good-bye to Vorländer, Jost and the Wisetzkis outside his house.

"You have taught me a good lesson," he said. "Who would have suspected Fleder of being such a scoundrel. Dear me, what hypocrisy! But you are a fine one, Herr Lubentsov. You ought to have told me at once. Your irony, young man, is quite devastating. The poor man is almost having hysterics in there. Worse than some fine lady—although some fine ladies have much more pluck. You've caused quite an uproar in there. Very well, good night. We'll have a talk tomorrow." He laughed. "But on the whole it was quite a good party, don't you think?"

He quickly shook Lubentsov's hand and hurried back to his guests. The others, after congratulating the commandant on Fleder's exposure, took their departure. Left alone, Lubentsov was conscious of a great weariness. A light warm rain was falling, and he lifted up his face to the cool refreshing drops. He heard voices over at the house. A flash-light went on and off. Some of the guests were leaving.

The old boy took it quite well, thought Lubentsov with a surge of affection for Sebastian.

19

The following morning Lubentsov, on his way to his office, noticed an American army Dodge standing outside Pingel's restaurant. Sergeant Veretennikov and two soldiers were hovering beside it.

"Some Americans in there," said Veretennikov. "Got into a fight. We don't know what to do with them. Allies, after all. Can't very well arrest them. Besides it isn't so easy. They're drunk as lords."

Lubentsov went into the restaurant. A group of six Americans was seated around one of the tables. They were singing at the top of their voices. There was no one else in the place, but at the door leading to the kitchen Lubentsov caught sight of the frightened face of Frau Pingel. When she saw Lubentsov she vanished, reappearing a moment later with a pale and trembling Pingel. His arm was in a sling.

The Americans stopped singing at the sight of the Russian officer and shouted to him gaily in English, evidently inviting him to join them. One of them picked up two unopened bottles and shook them invitingly upside down.

Another member of the party, a lieutenant who was evidently somewhat more sober than his pals and who spoke German, answered Lubentsov's questions. Nothing much had happened, he said. They had simply thrown out all the Germans because they had no business being there when Americans were drinking. They hadn't paid their bill and didn't intend to because the "lousy nazis" ought to know better than to ask Americans or Russians for money and they ought to be damned thankful they weren't bumped off.

This was not hatred, it was a "lark" on the part of a few irresponsible young men who as victors in a vanquished country felt entitled to a little fun; the same sort of spirit that was occasionally encountered among the Soviet soldiers but which was vigorously combated by the Soviet authorities.

Lubentsov asked what they were doing in Lauterburg, and the lieutenant replied that they were on their way to Berlin on business. Lubentsov said they had ob-

viously made a mistake since their route did not pass through Lauterburg at all.

"What's the difference?" said the lieutenant.

Lubentsov told them as sternly as he could that they must leave at once and that as the commandant he could not allow them to hold drunken brawls in his town. The lieutenant took offence. He said huffily that he had not expected to see the Russians siding with the Germans against their own allies. Lubentsov repeated firmly that it was not a matter of siding with the Germans at all but of abiding by the regulations enforced by the Control Council, of which, as the lieutenant undoubtedly knew, both General Eisenhower and Marshal Zhukov were members. The lieutenant pouted and Lubentsov felt a little sorry for him; he looked like a child who has a box of matches taken away from him and who cannot understand why people have to go and spoil his fun.

The lieutenant told the others to get ready. They got up unwillingly, bade Lubentsov a not too friendly goodbye and drove off.

"They didn't pay their bill!" wailed Frau Pingel throwing up her hands.

The waitresses set to work to clear up the mess of broken glass and china while Pingel stood by looking on gloomily.

Lubentsov began searching his pockets with the intention of reimbursing Pingel for his losses, since up to a point he considered it his duty to defend the honour of the allies. But he discovered that he had no money on him. He was in the habit of spending rather freely, for money meant nothing to him after having lived on chits throughout the war. All he knew was that the commandant had to pay for everything he got, and since he had forgotten the value of money, he usually paid three times more than he should have.

This incident with the Americans was only one of many, for beginning with September they had been showing up in Lauterburg more and more frequently. Some of them came to the commandant's office, but most of them simply drove into town and stayed over with the local Germans. Lubentsov was naturally disturbed by this, and queried the Soviet Military Administration as to what steps to take. The reasons given for the American visits were most varied. One captain came to pay some German shopkeeper for purchases made several months previously; another American officer, when the commandant's patrol discovered his car in a Lauterburg courtyard, explained that he did not know that there was only one prescribed road by which he might travel to Berlin; another group of officers travelled up and down the area for several days and when questioned claimed that they were having a joy ride, and so on.

The instructions from SMAG were to escort the Americans to the demarcation line and to explain politely but firmly that they were breaking the law. There seemed good grounds for suspecting that these visits were being made for purposes of intelligence. It was quite possible, however, that this was not always the case. For example, the Americans who had been drinking in Pingel's restaurant had hardly been engaged on a secret mission. But there were a number of incidents that put Lubentsov on his guard.

One American he particularly distrusted was a Captain O'Sullivan who had come ostensibly to settle some old bills with German shopkeepers. When he was detained and brought to the commandant's office, Lubentsov called in Captain Chokhov and ordered him to escort the American to the demarcation line.

Chokhov drove ahead in his own car and the American followed behind. At first Chokhov had thought the

order should be reversed but on second thoughts he decided it might be better not to emphasize his role as escort and to show the maximum tact to an ally. At the very first village they came to, however, Chokhov looked back to discover that the American's car had disappeared. He stopped and waited for about five minutes, then turned and drove back.

The American's car was standing in the middle of the village by the pub. Neither the captain nor his driver was in sight.

Chokhov went into the pub. The Americans were standing at the bar, chatting with the pretty barmaid. O'Sullivan appeared to speak German quite fluently although in Lauterburg he had denied that he knew the language.

He looked round when Chokhov entered. Chokhov, his face grim, pointed to the door.

"Okay," said the American with a grin and sauntered to the exit.

Chokhov went out after him. The Americans got into their car. Chokhov said a few hard words to them in Russian accompanied by some eloquent gestures, then got into his own car and after a moment's hesitation drove off ahead as before.

At the next village the American car came alongside Chokhov's and O'Sullivan stuck a bottle out of the window obviously suggesting that they stop and have a drink. Chokhov merely gave him an annihilating glance.

The next moment O'Sullivan's car, a large Studebaker still bearing green, brown and white camouflage stripes, passed Chokhov's car with a roar and disappeared behind the bend. Chokhov was furious.

"Step on it," he growled. The driver complied, but the Studebaker was a more powerful car, and, moreover, the road was hilly. Chokhov did not catch up with it until they reached the next village where they came upon

the Studebaker parked again by the pub. Chokhov looked rather sheepish when he went into the pub to meet the sardonic grin of O'Sullivan who was sitting at a table sipping some brown liquor. The bottle—the one with which he had tempted Chokhov—stood open on the table.

"Have a drink?" said O'Sullivan, seizing a chair and moving it up to the table.

Chokhov at that moment would have liked to take the American by the collar and drag him out to the car, but remembering Lubentsov's warning about tactful behaviour towards an ally, he sat down and took out a cigarette. O'Sullivan whisked out a packet of Chesterfields and offered it to Chokhov, but he refused and lit his own. The glass of whisky which the other had poured for him stood untouched. O'Sullivan picked it up and stood it on his head. Then he got up and, balancing the glass on his head, climbed on to the chair and from there on to the table, then back from the table on to the chair, and thence on to the floor, sat down, took the glass off his head and placed it on the table in front of Chokhov.

Chokhov's face did not betray even a flicker of amusement.

The American picked up three tumblers and started juggling with them. He did it very skilfully, keeping an eye on Chokhov who sat looking extremely bored. The American then spread out his arms and the three glasses fell on to the floor with a loud crash and were smashed to pieces. Chokhov did not move a muscle as he continued to regard the American solemnly and puff on his cigarette.

After that the American paid his bill and walked towards the exit. Chokhov got up and went after him, feeling very foolish and cursing Lubentsov for having chosen him of all people to escort this clown to the border.

When O'Sullivan got into his car beside the driver, Chokhov opened the back door of the car and sat down on the back seat. O'Sullivan laughed and they drove off, with Chokhov's car following behind.

They reached the village at the demarcation line without further adventure. The border post at the entrance to the village was manned by a Soviet sentry. O'Sullivan, using sign language, invited Chokhov to drive on with him into the American zone, and poured out a flood of English in which the Russian word *karashaw* occurred several times.

Chokhov got out of the car and said to the Russian sentry, "Let him get the hell out of here. . . ."

The soldier raised the barrier. O'Sullivan waved goodbye to Chokhov, and the car continued down the road to a bridge over a small river some forty metres farther on where an American soldier stood.

20

Chokhov returned to Lauterburg around seven in the evening. He was on his way upstairs to the commandant's office when a sudden thrill of pleasant anticipation caused him to stop in his tracks. Puzzled, he searched his mind for an explanation and remembered with a start that the German study class was due to meet that evening at eight.

Chokhov frowned and went on up the stairs. After reporting to Kasatkin—Lubentsov was away in Halle—that the American had been safely escorted to the other side, he went off to the room where the study circle was held. Nearly all the officers were already there. Ksenia was sitting at a small table reading her notes. Her hair was twisted into two thick braids wound round her head so tightly that one felt sure it must pain her.

She looked up when Chokhov entered the room and bent again quickly over the notes.

While waiting for the class to assemble the officers were having a quiet chat. They were discussing Lauterburg, each man judging the town from his own individual viewpoint. The dialogue Chokhov overheard went approximately as follows:

Yavorsky: A very civilized little town. The public library is always full of young people. They read a great deal here. They're very fond of their town and especially its historical buildings.

Chegodayev: Industrious town. Any amount of workshops, repair shops and lord knows what else. Quite a substantial industry too. Good workers, skilled and efficient.

Lieutenant, platoon commander: A city of good-for-nothings. Full of drunks, the pubs are always crowded. Can't understand when they work.

Menshov: A very decent town. The people are very polite, especially the children. It's always *bitte* this and *bitte* that. Very neat and tidy, too.

Vorobeitsev: Moral cesspool. Place is full of prostitutes and speculators. Disgusting!

Which of them was right? All of them.

Chokhov sometimes saw Ksenia home after the class. They talked little at first, but as time went on they found more and more to say to each other. Indeed people who knew them would have been amazed to hear how freely their conversation flowed. Ksenia did most of the talking. She seemed to be making up for her customary silence. She poured out her heart to Chokhov and she had no fear that her confidences would be betrayed. She felt, as indeed most people who knew him did, that she could trust him.

As for Chokhov, his boyish contempt for women which he had not yet overcome gradually began to disappear.

As his friendship with Ksenia deepened, their walks grew longer, often taking them quite a long way from town. It would have been hard to say which of them was the initiator of these walks—they somehow happened of themselves. Perhaps the idea was really Ksenia's, for Chokhov was shy of being seen out walking in town with a girl. It was not the Germans he cared about, but if they happened to meet some Soviet officers or soldiers he would blush like a schoolboy. Perhaps he feared that he might be suspected of the heinous offence of walking out with a German girl. Not that Ksenia could ever be mistaken for a German. The Germans themselves would have laughed at the notion, for Ksenia was as typically Russian as it was possible to be. But for Chokhov that was not the chief consideration. His pride suffered at the suggestion that he was just as incapable of getting along without female companionship as other men. Nevertheless he could not endure the thought of discontinuing their walks. They would roam among the narrow medieval byways that resembled toy theatre sets, and climbing the hill by footpaths carpeted with yellow and gold maple and beech leaves, they would soon reach the crest from where the red roofs of the town and the bright golden trees glowing in the light of the setting sun presented a scene of tranquil beauty. On the other side of the town on a rocky crag stood the castle, grey and austere in all weathers and looking from this distance like something out of one of Grimm's fairy-tales.

But when on one occasion Chokhov pointed this out to Ksenia, she surprised him by flying into a passion.

"How forgetful you all are!" she cried, looking at him with undisguised scorn. "No wonder they are so pleased with you people. Not so long ago they were shouting, 'Russ, surrender!' and now it's 'Russ very good.' And you believe them! How can you? Oh, I do

wish I could go home. How long must we stay here? Why don't you try to find out?"

In his heart of hearts he agreed with her. Her words touched to life something he had believed to be long forgotten and dead, but which evidently still smouldered within him—fragments of memories, thoughts of loved ones who had perished, of the charred ruins of what had once been homes. And Chokhov felt almost conscience-stricken at the thought that, like so many others, he had proved to be so ready to forgive and forget the past.

At the same time such was his faith in the wisdom and fairness of the Soviet Government's policy towards the population of the defeated country and in the success of the struggle for the new way of life in Germany that he could not allow Ksenia's words and his own unspoken thoughts to go unanswered.

"You can't lump them all together," he told her. "What about Marx and Engels? What about Liebknecht? Or Thaelmann?"

"They were either driven out of Germany or murdered," she replied. "They kill everyone, everyone who wants to do them good. They'd have killed Wandergast and Lerche long ago if they had a chance. And they'd kill Lubentsov and you too, if they could."

Chokhov tried to imagine what Lubentsov would have said to that, and decided at once that he would have replied, "Don't worry, we won't give them a chance." Or something like it. And Chokhov envied Lubentsov for his ability to answer such questions so lightly, without going into the substance of the problem when there was no need, because it was absurd after all to stand here on this hill among the golden leaves and argue about what was happening down below. And no doubt Lubentsov would have been right not to start discussing problems that were agitating the entire world at that moment.

But Chokhov could not make light of it because Ksenia's words had impressed him deeply. Moreover, what he liked most about Ksenia was her seriousness. She did not try to flirt with him, and he appreciated that, for flirtation was not in his line.

They stood for a while in silence, then she moved on slowly down the path; she did not challenge him to follow her, she merely glanced back at him with a purely feminine gesture that would have revealed much to a more discerning person than Chokhov. But Chokhov at that moment was thinking more of what she had said than of Ksenia herself.

On another occasion she took him over to the castle on the hill. It was not at all as desolate and uninhabited as it had seemed from afar. Every room inside those massive walls, even every nook and gallery once occupied by the soldiers who had manned the battlements turned out to be tenanted by people who had been bombed out of their homes during the American air raids. Children played on the uneven, time-worn paving stones of the castle yard.

The caretaker, an old man of sixty, told them some of the many legends associated with the place. They were very similar to the legends built around most medieval German castles. Once upon a time this had been the residence of a prince who used to confine his enemies in the dungeons. It was said that coins had once been minted in the castle's vaults; the mintmen were held in captivity and died in the dungeons without seeing the light of day. The prince had an only son whom he executed, and afterwards in a fit of remorse he rode his horse over a precipice.

Among the relics of a later period were a clavichord, a portrait of Catherine II painted when she was still the Princess Anhalt-Zerbst, and some old furniture.

The caretaker spoke highly of the Soviet commandant

on whose orders the present tenants were being gradually moved to town and a museum was soon to be opened here.

On one of their walks Ksenia took Chokhov to the other end of the town, and, turning off into a field beyond the last houses, led the way to a group of ugly wooden, barrack-like structures. As they approached Ksenia slowed down her pace. Chokhov guessed that this had been the camp for Russian prisoners and that Ksenia had once lived here. She went over to one of the houses and knocked at a window. A large, pale, bearded face appeared, and a few minutes later a man with a wooden leg wearing a white shirt which hung loosely over his trousers came to the door.

"Hullo Gosha," said Ksenia. "This is Captain Chokhov."

Her use of the diminutive for Georgy jarred unpleasantly on Chokhov's ear. But his momentary annoyance passed as soon as the man began to speak. There was something quite remarkable about him. He lived alone here in the barracks, for everyone else had left. He did not work because of his leg, he said. But his former camp-mates were all working now and they kept him supplied with everything he needed—although he never asked for anything.

"I'll stay here until they send me back home," he said.

"When will that be?" Chokhov asked him.

"Soon, they say. How about you?" he asked, turning to Ksenia.

"I've applied time and again but they won't let me go yet," she answered. She looked up with a frown at Chokhov. "You might put in a word for me to the lieutenant-colonel. He speaks German no worse than I do, so he doesn't really need me. He's got Yavorsky. Besides, he can easily find someone to take my place."

"All right, I'll tell him," said Chokhov.

The quick glance Ksenia threw at him expressed a whole gamut of complex emotions. Yes, she wanted to go home, sincerely wished it; hence she ought to have welcomed Chokhov's promise to speak to Lubentsov on her behalf. And she did welcome it, for she knew that Chokhov and Lubentsov were good friends. But at the same time she was hurt that Chokhov should have taken her sincerity for granted and that he should be so ready to help her to leave.

But Chokhov's was too artless a nature for him to be conscious of these subtleties.

Yet when he learned next day after work that Ksenia had gone with Kasatkin on a business trip to the country he discovered that he missed her. The discovery both surprised and annoyed him, and it was not until the same thing occurred several days in succession that he began to guess at last that he was in love.

But even after he realized that he loved Ksenia he could not reconcile himself to the thought that she was the girl whom destiny had in store for him. The element of chance in their relations disturbed him. After all, if his unit had not been disbanded, if he had not agreed to work in the Soviet Military Administration, if he had not been sent to Altstadt and met Lubentsov there, if Albina had not run off and if the peg-legged man had not recommended Ksenia to take her place, if indeed Ksenia had happened to be in some other town instead of Lauterburg, and if Lubentsov had not induced him to study German—if none of these things had happened Chokhov would never have met Ksenia and become attached to her. This reasoning, naive as it was, had a powerful effect on Chokhov and kept him from revealing his feelings.

He had had no definite idea how it ought to happen—that encounter with the woman who would be all his

life to him. Perhaps he had thought that she would be someone from his native town, someone he had known from childhood. Or perhaps he had imagined himself setting out like the hero in the fairy-tale in search of his happiness, in which case he would surely be given some sign that would tell him that it was she and none other? Perhaps his mind really did cherish some such dream-like notion, for the fancies of childhood are not so easily relinquished as one might think.

The fact that Ksenia had been brought to Germany in war-time and had lived there for so many years cast a definite shadow on their relations. The male population of a country invaded by foreign armies are prone to an acute jealousy of their womenfolk who remained in occupied territory. That is how it was when the Germans occupied Soviet territory and many German men now felt the same about their own womenfolk.

This peculiar, nation-wide jealousy which was manifested by many of our soldiers and officers in relation to the Russian girls who had been forced to work in Germany, was frequently as unjust as it was insulting. But it existed nevertheless. The men hated and despised Russian women who had been intimate with the invaders perhaps even more than they hated and despised the invaders themselves.

Chokhov, who had been deeply moved by Ksenia's hatred for the Germans, read another, more personal meaning into that hatred. He assumed, without having the slightest grounds for doing so, that it was not so much the German fascists generally that she hated for the crimes they had committed, as one particular German for some crime perpetrated against herself.

And this incomprehensible, unreasoning jealousy for some hypothetical German conjured up by his own imagination caused the proud, reserved Chokhov much pain that was no easier to bear for having no foundation.

21

Naturally their walks and trysts could not long remain a secret, and Chokhov began to notice, or perhaps to imagine, that his comrades were casting significant looks and veiled hints at him. Once or twice during one of the regular conferences held after working hours Lubentsov had turned to him and said that since there was nothing on that concerned him directly he might go. For the first time in his life Chokhov felt shy and self-conscious in the society of his fellow-officers. He had never been afraid of anyone before, but now he lived in constant terror of some hint or suggestion of ridicule on the part of his comrades. It seemed to him that Ksenia must surely be even more sensitive to all this than himself, and was amazed to note that she appeared to fear nothing. The truth was that though she was younger she was far more mature. Chokhov, however, took her self-possession as a sign that she did not care for him. But he was wrong, she loved him but was convinced, on her part, that the thought of love had never entered his head.

At any rate Ksenia succeeded in accomplishing something even Lubentsov had failed to do, namely, to win Chokhov away from Vorobeitsev. Chokhov now lost all interest in his former friend.

Vorobeitsev was not slow to notice this change in Chokhov's attitude, and he soon guessed at its cause. He understood that Ksenia had come between him and his friend and he suspected that she was bent on turning Chokhov against him. He was not far wrong. Ksenia had taken a dislike to Vorobeitsev as soon as he had turned up at the commandant's office. She had tried to hide her feelings but her eyes gave her away. Those eyes of hers which concealed the gentler emotions so successfully were incapable of hiding any feeling of

hostility or dislike. The Germans who came to the office on diverse business trembled inwardly when she looked at them. Vorobeitsev encountering that same expression once or twice was much disconcerted and he tried to avoid her as much as possible.

He was now greatly put out when he learned that his friend Vasya Chokhov had "fallen for that little witch."

Of late Vorobeitsev had begun to keep away from the other officers. He had less and less in common with them since they were all engrossed in their work and under Lubentsov's influence laboured with what Vorobeitsev felt to be an almost fanatical zeal. He himself cared little for the work and he justified his attitude on the grounds that he was a man of broader interests than the others. He began to adopt a supercilious attitude to his fellow-officers with their "respectability" and their horror of the "capitalist environment" which he openly scoffed at. Neither could he share their desire to return to their native land, their often expressed yearning for home. He considered this to be either added proof of their mediocrity or hypocrisy because here they were far better off materially than they would be at home. Moreover, here they were persons of some consequence whereas at home they would be in no way distinguished from millions of their compatriots, and perhaps would be obliged to share the hardships of life in war-wrecked towns and villages. Hence he could not believe the Soviet officers were sincere in their desire to return home. As far as Vorobeitsev was concerned, he felt perfectly at home in Germany and even the ugliest aspects of life in the capitalist world, including the brothels, failed to disgust him. On the contrary, he took to that life as a duck takes to water.

Observing that Chokhov was drifting away from him, Vorobeitsev fell into a state of depression and on discovering who it was that had robbed him of his friend, he

resorted to a tactic as old as the world: he began to spread malicious rumours about Ksenia.

He was not deliberately out to slander an innocent person, he was prompted by his utter lack of respect for women in general and his deep conviction that all women were by nature wanton. Hence when he hinted to Chegodayev, Menshov and several others at Ksenia's behaviour during her stay in Germany, he actually believed it was true, although he had no proof whatsoever and did not consider it necessary to seek any. He even believed that he was doing Chokhov a service by indirectly warning him away from this girl before it was too late.

True, he did not have the courage to go straight to Chokhov with his story, for the simple reason that he respected Chokhov and admired him for his honesty and integrity of character, and for Vorobeitsev to respect meant to fear. He looked upon Chokhov as a model he would have liked to emulate if he could.

One night, when Vorobeitsev was on duty in the commandant's office, Jost called up from the police department to report that another American army car had been seen in one of the town's backyards. Vorobeitsev took a soldier with him and drove out to the place.

Having first questioned the tenants, Vorobeitsev mounted the stairs to the first floor and there in the flat belonging to one Merker he found the ubiquitous Captain O'Sullivan. The American laughed heartily when he saw the Soviet officer with the red band on his arm and got ready to leave without more ado.

While O'Sullivan was collecting his belongings, Vorobeitsev got into conversation with Merker, a slick-looking individual with a black moustache à la Adolf Hitler. He evidently had no definite trade and made his living by brokering and speculation. Under Seelenbach he had worked in the Town Council, where he had been in charge

of finance and trade, but had been dismissed at Yavorsky's insistence when it was learned that he had been a member and minor official of the nazi party. His flat was luxuriously furnished, and there was an abundance of bronze statuettes, carpets, expensive porcelain, paintings and valuable period furniture.

Vorobeitsev with Merker at his elbow wandered about the flat examining the bric-à-brac.

"Very handsome," Vorobeitsev observed, fingering a large rug hanging on the wall.

"It's for sale, Herr Captain," said Merker. "Only two thousand marks."

The same thing happened each time Vorobeitsev admired some object in the apartment.

"You may buy it if you wish," and the price followed.

Everything here appeared to be for sale.

After that first visit Vorobeitsev began to frequent Merker's flat. He acquired at low cost a great many things through Merker, for the German was not slow to appreciate the value of having a connection like Vorobeitsev in the Soviet commandant's office.

In his effort to induce Chokhov to give up Ksenia, Vorobeitsev ordered Merker to get him a good motor-cycle. He knew that Chokhov had been dreaming of a motorbike for a long time. Before long Merker telephoned Vorobeitsev that he had found one. Vorobeitsev looked up Chokhov and together they went to Gneisenaustrasse where Merker lived.

The motor-cycle turned out to be a first-class model, with a powerful engine and handsome finish. Chokhov's eyes shone when he saw it. Without a word he straddled the seat, started the engine and rode straight out of the gates. He rode slowly at first, then faster and faster until, finding himself beyond the city limits, he hurtled along at top speed. Outwardly he was his calm imperturbable self, but as he raced along at breakneck speed, his eye

on the road, his hands firmly gripping the handle-bars, his heart sang within him. This was something his spirit had craved for a long time.

Returning to Merker's backyard he paid for the bike without a word and told Vorobeitsev to get on the pillion. After a moment's hesitation Vorobeitsev complied and they swept out of the yard like a whirlwind. Vorobeitsev turned pale. They tore through the streets, leaving the town behind in a matter of minutes. The wind whistled in their ears. Vorobeitsev hung on to Chokhov for dear life.

"Don't cling so tight," said Chokhov, turning to Vorobeitsev for a second, his face calm and grave.

"Keep your eyes on the road!" roared Vorobeitsev.

"Then don't cling," Chokhov repeated.

"Let me get off, for Christ's sake," begged Vorobeitsev. "Or else slow down a bit."

Chokhov slowed down and they turned back to town.

At the commandant's office they were immediately surrounded by a knot of curious soldiers, who examined the bike carefully, appraising it from every angle. Presently Ksenia appeared in the doorway. She too came over and looked at the motor-cycle. Chokhov turned very red. He did not know what to do. She clearly expected him to join her, but how could he go off with her in front of everybody and leave the bike standing there?

"Natty bike, eh?" Vorobeitsev was saying to the soldiers. "I got it for him. I hereby appoint Captain Chokhov chairman of the Suicide Club. You ought to see him ride it! Faster than sound! A hair's breadth from death every minute! No end of thrills!"

Ksenia looked searchingly at Chokhov. Then to everybody's surprise she said:

"Take me for a ride, please."

Chokhov blushed again, this time with pleasure. The engine roared. The soldiers stepped back, and the next moment Chokhov and Ksenia had rocketed out of sight.

"Ouff!" said Veretennikov. "That's something!"

"Hope he doesn't run anyone down," observed Nebaba, shaking his head.

"Not him," said Voronin. "He's a cool one, that chap. I know him."

The soldiers went back to their posts. Vorobeitsev hung about expecting Chokhov to come back. He waited for a long time but Chokhov failed to appear, and finally he gave up in disgust and walked slowly home.

In the meantime Chokhov and Ksenia had driven quite some distance from town. Now and again he glanced into the mirror at Ksenia's face which was calm though a little pink from the excitement.

"See you don't knock any Germans down," she said with a laugh. "The lieutenant-colonel would have you court-martialled in a jiffy.... By the way, have you spoken to him about me?"

"Not yet," Chokhov answered. "But I'll do it today."

When they came back to town Chokhov drove Ksenia home and went straight to Lubentsov's place. He found Colonel Sokolov there dining with the commandant. Lubentsov invited Chokhov to join them and he sat down and listened to their conversation.

"I don't understand anything about politics," Sokolov was saying. "I'm only a soldier. I'd go crazy if I had your job. Disgusting work. Pit-falls waiting for you around every corner. You can't tell what goes on in other people's minds, much less in the mind of a whole nation, and what a nation! I must say I don't like them."

"You know I can't understand that point of view at all," said Lubentsov. "I'm no politician either, but I am not the least bit proud of it, in fact I'm trying my best to be one. As for the Germans, to me they are the people who live in Germany and speak German. I refuse to believe that evil is the distinguishing trait of any nation. Anyone who believes that is only a step away

from racism. We fought the Germans for being racists, didn't we? No, Comrade Colonel! Yavorsky and I are now working on the school problem. The other day I read a German primer put out during the Hitler period. There was a chapter there entitled "The Russian" which said something like this: 'The Russian is fair-haired, lazy, cunning, fond of drinking and singing....' That was all. You might think they were describing some small obscure tribe instead of a great nation with centuries of history.... And just about as convincing as what we often say of the Germans: 'The Germans are neat, stingy, pedantic, and cruel....'"

"Very well, very well," Sokolov said, laughing. "You have me there, I admit. Yes, you are right. But you will have plenty of trouble with them just the same."

"Oh, I have no doubt of that," Lubentsov agreed with a laugh, then, his face grave again, he went on. "But I must tell you that my work gets easier every day. The Germans are rapidly waking up. The Communist Party has made tremendous progress and the Social-Democrats too are turning Left. As for the workers, they will have their say yet, mark my words."

Chokhov, listening to this conversation, regretted that Ksenia was not there. He admitted to himself sadly that in repeating the conversation to her he would not be able to make Lubentsov's words sound half as convincing. And at the thought of Ksenia he felt an oddly pleasant pang in his heart.

"Did you want to see me about something, Vasily Maximovich?" Lubentsov asked him when Sokolov had gone.

"No," said Chokhov after a momentary pause. "I just dropped in to see how you were." And he added, "Bought myself a motor-bike."

"Well, see you don't run over anybody," smiled Lubentsov. "You might get court-martialled, you know."

22

The "school question" on which Lubentsov and Yavorsky were working was by no means a simple problem. All German teaching personnel had belonged to the nazi party, and the textbooks were so pro-fascist that they had to be banned. While new textbooks were being compiled in Berlin, the Altstadt administration proposed collecting textbooks used under the Weimar Republic and organizing short training courses for teachers.

It was in this connection that Lubentsov thought of Erika. The fact that she appeared to do nothing shocked him—he heard her playing the piano when he left for the office in the morning and when he came home in the evening. He could not understand how an intelligent, well-educated young woman like her could live without working. Or was she waiting to catch a husband? Her idleness both surprised and irritated him. When he visited the Sebastians she would sit quietly in a corner of the room knitting or sewing, listening to the conversation and sometimes taking part in it. He had often heard her express some very sensible opinions about the activities of others but she never expressed any desire to do anything herself. When she spoke she would regard him with her clear steady gaze that was vaguely disturbing.

One evening he dropped in to see Sebastian and found her alone.

"Father will be here soon," she said. "Won't you wait and have some coffee with me?"

"Thanks, I will," said Lubentsov after a moment's hesitation. "As a matter of fact I wanted to talk to you."

She looked up at him surprised.

"We want to start a training course for teachers," Lubentsov began while she poured out the coffee. "I thought you would be the best person to organize it. You might wish to attend it yourself. I believe you would make an

excellent teacher. We will give you the house the British commandant's office occupied. You know the people here —I'm sure you could find enough intelligent, competent people who would be willing to teach the children of Lauterburg. And it should not be hard to find some educators to give them a brief course. Halle University is opening a two-year preparatory course for workers and peasants. This is a very important undertaking, Fräulein Erika. I might even say it is one on which the future of Germany to some extent depends."

"Do you think I could do it?"

"Of course! Why not? Besides, we will help you—your father, the Communists and the other democratic parties. Everyone will lend a hand." He smiled. "You needn't give up your music either.... How can you stand aloof from life at a time like this? How can you? I can't understand it. Forgive me for being so frank ...."

As she sat there motionless on the couch holding a cup of now cold coffee, a slender, graceful figure, her delicate-featured face framed in short chestnut hair and her large blue eyes gazing straight at him, she looked so lovely that he suddenly forgot what he wanted to say. For a minute or two neither of them spoke. In the silence they heard the clock in the next room strike nine.

"You are a strange man," she said at last. "I believe nothing in the world interests you outside of your work."

"Yes, thanks for reminding me," he said, shaking off the spell. He got up. "I must hurry back to the office."

She, too, got up quickly and went over to him. "Please don't go," she implored. Then, recovering her composure at once, she went on in her normal voice, "Father will be here any minute now. Your offer interests me. You are quite right, and I thank you for being frank with me."

I must go, he kept thinking, but he sat down again. Fortunately at that moment the door opened and Sebastian came in.

"Father," said Erika, hurrying to meet him, "Herr Lubentsov has offered me the job of organizing a teachers' training course. He wants me to be a schoolteacher."

Sebastian opened his eyes wide.

"What? Are you serious?" he asked turning to Lubentsov. He thought for a moment. "But after all, why not? A splendid idea. Splendid!" He began pacing the room, rubbing his hands and glancing slyly now at Erika, now at Lubentsov. "You have the makings of a great teacher yourself, Herr Lubentsov. You have an unusual gift for understanding people. Your offer to Erika proves it. I have been racking my brains for a long time trying to find something for Erika to do and nothing like that entered my head. Yet I am a teacher myself, and quite an experienced one at that. Well, Erika, what do you say to the proposition?"

"I should like to try," she said shyly, her eyes shining.

"I'm very glad..." Lubentsov began, but Sebastian cut him short.

"My dear Herr Lubentsov, there is no need for diplomatic speeches. You can't help having so many clever ideas. By the way, have you heard? Fleder has run away to the West!" This was indeed news to Lubentsov and Sebastian was very proud of being better informed than the commandant. "You see what a good Landrat I have become," he laughed. "This is the first time I have scooped you on important news."

Lubentsov left and Sebastian was about to retire for the night when there was a ring at the door, loud footsteps in the hall and the sound of muffled conversation. It was Walter. He and the American Major Collins were back from Berlin.

They had been detained longer than they had expected. Though they were late for Erika's birthday, they had brought her a great many presents. Collins presented her

with a box of stockings and a whole hamper of food—coffee, chocolate and tinned goods. Since they were greatly pressed for time they got down to business at once. Collins, who was too drunk to take any part in the conversation, sat back and watched his coloured driver hurry back and forth carrying in the bounty he had brought. He considered that the best way to put his point across.

Walter began again to persuade his father to move to the West, but received an even more evasive answer than the last time.

"We shall see," the professor repeated. "There is no need for haste. I should be very happy to be with you, of course, but I am not ready at the moment to make such important decisions.... Besides, in all probability the peace treaty will be signed before long, in which case...."

"The peace treaty!" scoffed Walter. "Are you really banking on that?"

"It's too late to start political discussions at this time of the night," Erika broke in angrily. "You can talk in the morning. Father must go to bed."

But they did not have an opportunity to resume the conversation next morning. Someone had reported to the commandant's office that another American car had turned up in the town, and although the driver on Collins' instructions had parked the car in a courtyard in another street it was found and its ownership traced without much difficulty.

Very early in the morning Vorobeitsev, who happened to be on duty in the commandant's office, rang the bell of Professor Sebastian's house and told the American to leave at once. Collins tried to bluster at first, but Vorobeitsev was firm. Collins, cursing in Russian and English, had to submit. Walter turned on his father in a fury.

"That's how much your official position is worth!" he fumed. "You haven't even the right to receive your own son."

"Who, incidentally, is trying to persuade me to give up that official position," retorted Sebastian. But he slipped on his coat over his pyjamas and hurried down to Lubentsov's house to have it out with the commandant.

"I see I shall have to move away from your house," Lubentsov said, shaking his head. "Living so close to you puts me under the obligation of having to violate the orders of my superiors. I'm afraid I can do nothing this time. The Americans must abide by the rules laid down by Zhukov and Eisenhower."

"Send the American away if you like, but leave my son alone!"

They left it at that. Vorobeitsev was given orders to let Walter remain and to escort the American to the demarcation line, but Walter refused to stay and left with the major.

Vorobeitsev got along splendidly with the American major. Collins invited him to ride in his car and Vorobeitsev gladly accepted. His own car followed behind. Collins chattered incessantly, plied Vorobeitsev with gin and ended up by inviting him to come and see him in Frankfort. He gave him his address and promised him a rollicking good time.

They found they had mutual acquaintances. When Vorobeitsev told the major that he knew several of the officers who had been assigned to the American delegation at the Potsdam Conference and mentioned the name of White, Collins was delighted.

"Frank White!" he cried. "I know him very well. He's in Frankfort too. Works in the Military Government, not in my department, though. A first-class officer. Has a very high opinion of the Russians. Incidentally, he speaks Russian quite fluently."

"Yes," Vorobeitsev confirmed. "That's the one. Frank is his name." He suddenly recalled the "operation" with the rings and lapsed into an awkward silence.

"A fine officer, one of the best," Collins continued to rhapsodize. "If I'm not mistaken he's not a lieutenant any more. Been promoted, I believe. What's your name by the way? I'll tell him I had the pleasure of meeting you —true, under rather inauspicious circumstances, but ... duty is duty, I suppose."

Vorobeitsev who could not get the ring incident out of his head avoided giving his name and now regretted having mentioned White. He said that White didn't know his family name in any case, he used to call him by his first name, Victor.

Sebastian's son kept silent throughout the journey, replying with a curt "yes" or "no" whenever Collins addressed him.

When they reached the demarcation line Collins jumped out of the car with Vorobeitsev, shook his hand heartily and repeated his invitation.

"Be sure and come," he said. "You won't be sorry, I promise you. We can take a trip to Paris, for a day or two. Ever been to Paris? No? Too bad. That city deserves its reputation. We often run over there with or without permission."

On the way back Vorobeitsev thought about Collins and White and again he felt slightly envious of them and all Americans in general. He cared nothing for any of them as individuals. As a matter of fact, he rather despised them, and he shared the opinion held by many Soviet officers that Americans were indifferent soldiers and that it had not been very hard for them to beat the Germans since by the time they came on the scene the Germans had been bled white. What he envied was their devil-may-care attitude to life and he pictured the American zone of occupation and all of Western Europe in general as a place where one could lead a life of endless excitement and adventure, which was almost unthink-

able in the Soviet zone under the watchful eye of the Soviet chiefs.

Yes, the Soviet chiefs were very earnest about everything they did. They seriously wanted to change the German way of life, they took all the decisions of diverse international conferences and their own obligations very seriously, they were deeply convinced they could make the Germans a peace-loving nation. Being avowed materialists they believed in ideas and ideals that were scoffed at by the Americans, those very Americans, including the highest ranking officials, who never failed in their public utterances to mention God, Providence and supreme justice.

On reaching the commandant's office, Vorobeitsev found his fellow-officers in conference, one of those uninspiring routine conferences which bored him to tears, especially today in contrast to the fascinating world he had just been picturing to himself. The agenda dealt with state farms and seed farms, and the general problem of seed for the coming spring sowing; the potato crop, the development of local tobacco growing and similar matters all of which were excruciatingly dull to Vorobeitsev. He looked with wonder at the other officers who seemed to be discussing all these questions with eager interest.

23

All these things which to Vorobeitsev were so much dull routine were indeed of vital and engrossing interest to Lubentsov and the other officers. They rejoiced at each new evidence of awakening political awareness on the part of a German worker or peasant, and every set-back in their work grieved them deeply.

Latterly, however, Lubentsov had begun to be tormented by strange hallucinations. Often as he sat alone in

the evenings he imagined he heard voices—German voices, men's, women's and children's, old and young. Now and again he would recognize a familiar voice repeating rapidly but distinctly something that had been said in the course of the day. This incessant multivoiced hum in his ears drove him to a point of frenzy. He slept poorly at nights and he began to fear that he was losing his mind. It was an ordinary case of nervous fatigue, but Lubentsov who had never known any other fatigue but physical was seriously alarmed.

He concealed his condition from everyone, including Voronin. But the latter soon noticed his unhealthy pallor and took to dropping in at the little house of an evening. Lubentsov was very grateful to him for this. On several occasions Voronin tried tactfully to persuade Lubentsov to take a holiday, but he would not hear of it; there was far too much work to be done, and besides, Lubentsov was not accustomed to resting.

Even on his Sunday walks through the town he never ceased to be the commandant, for people would stop him in the street to present him with all kinds of problems, requests or complaints. Once, as he was about to go out for a quiet stroll, he remembered how the guests at Erika Sebastian's birthday party had failed to recognize him when he had turned up in mufti, and he decided to resort to the same device on his Sunday walks. To his surprise it worked. He was often amazed to see people he knew quite well pass by without so much as a glance at him. This might have been a form of escape from the burden of duties had it not been for his own irrepressible nature. For whenever he came across some irregularity—a street still cluttered with debris, a shop or a cinema or a pub still unopened in spite of the order issued by the commandant's office—he would go out of his way to hunt up the guilty party. On such occasions he would be much amused to see the change of tone and the discomfiture

of the culprits when they realized that it was "Oberstleutnant Davai" they were talking to.

Once his wanderings took him out to Kleinpeterstrasse, the "red light" district. He had heard of the place before but had never seen it with his own eyes. It shocked him profoundly and he went off at once in search of Vorländer. He found the bürgermeister at a game of whist with Wisetzki and another council member who was in charge of cultural problems.

Vorländer's wife who opened the door was reluctant to admit this stranger who demanded to see the bürgermeister at once. She took him for a Baltic German because of his harsh accent.

"Playing cards?" he mocked as he strode into the room scowling at the group seated around the card table.

But he burst out laughing when he saw the indignant and bewildered face of the bürgermeister. It was only then that Vorländer recognized him and he slapped himself on the knee and grinned.

"Lieutenant-Colonel!" he exclaimed. "I didn't recognize you without your uniform. You look quite different."

"You'd look quite different too," returned Lubentsov grimly, "if you had seen what I've just seen."

He went on to describe what he had seen on Kleinpeterstrasse. The Germans showed no surprise at what he told them, for they were so used to all this that they took it for granted. But since the commandant was so insistent, Vorländer said that they would go and look over the place tomorrow and take the matter up at the next meeting of the Council.

"Why tomorrow? Let's go at once. You are too fond of postponing things."

Reluctantly they put on their coats and set out. Lubentsov was about to go with them, but on second thoughts he left them to attend to the matter themselves and continued his walk alone.

Prostitution in Lauterburg was not confined to Kleinpeterstrasse. It existed in diverse forms, one of these being the marriage advertisements Lubentsov had noticed posted outside information offices and on the walls of buildings. They ran approximately thus:

"Young widow, 29, blonde, regular features, fond of nature and animals, husband killed in 1942 on Eastern Front, would like to meet a gentleman under 50 for quiet walks and boating excursions. No marriage obligations."

"Young man, 42, dark, good salary, did not belong to nazi party, idealist, would like to meet young girl 19-20, blonde, 160 centimetres in height with possible view to marriage. Send photograph."

"Would educated young woman, about 25, Catholic, good testimonials, good figure, property, care to meet young man 45/158 (the first figure, Lubentsov learned, stood for the age, the second, the height in centimetres), dark hair, trustful and good-natured. Own car. Discretion guaranteed."

"Young man, 33/175, good-looking, lively, salesman, own car, divorced, art-lover, wishes to meet honest, comely young woman, any religion, under 22, 165 cm."

"Young girl, refugee from Silesia, 20/173, good family, slender, wants friend and protector under 60."

Lubentsov dropped into a cinema and saw a matinée showing of a film featuring the celebrated German film star Marika Röck and looked into a few barber-shops and cafés. Everything he saw distressed him. It gave him the impression of some slow process of decay, a degeneration of culture into something empty and glittering and catering to the lowest tastes. He had permitted one particularly persistent theatrical manager to open some sort of variety show and had once gone to see it, considering himself to some extent responsible for it. The cheap vulgarity of the performance horrified him. The most popular number on the programme, judging by the uproari-

ous laughter it evoked, was one in which a gentleman clad in evening dress sang some lewd ditty with his lady partner, smacking her playfully on the behind.

Lubentsov had wanted to close down the place forthwith, but Sebastian and Vorländer had dissuaded him on the grounds that such shows had existed in Germany long before the advent of Hitler and were in a sense traditional.

He gave in much against his will, for he was deeply convinced that traditions which are in such bad taste undermine public morals and ought to be abolished.

Adding to all his troubles was the fact that he was becoming disturbingly conscious of Erika Sebastian. He regretted having persuaded her to work, for now she was constantly telephoning to him for help and advice. Sometimes she came to see him at the office. He realized that it gave him pleasure to see her and all would have been well had it not been for her face, her frank, steady gaze —in a word, had she not been Erika but someone else.

One evening she came to see him at home on a matter that was really urgent. Fortunately Lubentsov was not alone. Voronin happened to be with him. The sergeant-major looked at Erika with alarm and suspicion while she talked to the commandant and when she had gone remarked, half joking, half in earnest:

"The Fräulein isn't in love with you by any chance, is she? Looks at you like a cat at a saucer of cream."

To his surprise, his chief, instead of being amused as he had expected him to be, flew into a rage at this and gave him a severe calling down.

"I never expected to hear such stupid talk from you," he declared. "Is the tainted atmosphere of bourgeois Europe affecting you too? Your behaviour is unworthy of a fighting man of the Red Army!"

Voronin shook his head but said nothing. Lubentsov continued to storm, himself horrified at his ridiculous

outburst but unable to stop. Finally he calmed down, apologized for losing his temper and smiled wanly. Voronin's heart ached to look at him.

"Will you go to bed now?" he asked.

"Yes, it's high time." After a pause Lubentsov added, "Chokhov seems to have fallen in love with our interpreter, am I right?"

"Looks like it."

"They're both so quiet and bashful I can't imagine how they get along."

"Oh, they manage somehow."

"Dmitry Yegorovich, stay here tonight, will you?"

"All right."

Voronin's presence had a soothing effect on him, and he slept that night better than he had for weeks.

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The following evening Erika came to see Lubentsov again. She knocked at the door and on receiving an invitation in Russian to come in she slowly opened the door.

She came in casting a curious yet timorous glance at the semi-dark room lighted only by the table-lamp. The fear in her eyes startled Lubentsov. This was not simply timidity, it was a woman's inward trembling in the face of the inevitable, a sweet submissiveness to the will of the male, a consciousness of the strength of her own weakness. All this and more Lubentsov read in her glance—timid yet bold, frightened yet trusting.

Only an old man or a philosopher could fail to be affected by this. Lubentsov was neither the one nor the other. But he was the commandant. And again that heightened sense of duty which had become second nature to him—a quality that belongs precisely to young men and non-philosophers—compelled him to behave with an

outward equanimity that betrayed nothing of the passion that stirred him.

He hardly knew what she was saying, what she had come to consult him about, because he knew, as she did herself, that it was only an excuse. But though his brain was in a whirl he replied sensibly to all her questions, at any rate his answers appeared to satisfy her. She wandered over to his book-shelves and examined the books. The table-lamp cast a ruddy glow over her features.

He knew that one tender word from him would have been sufficient. But with a superhuman effort of will he steadied himself and forced himself to talk of the "school problem." He delivered a whole lecture about the impermissibility of corporal punishment in the new German school. He recommended her to read Makarenko's *Road to Life* and Krupskaya's writings on education.

"German children," he went on, getting up and beginning to pace the room, "must be gently but firmly brought up in the spirit of love and respect for all nationalities and for all working people." He called her "Fräulein Sebastian," scrupulously avoiding the use of her first name.

"You must try to absorb these new ideas if you want to be happy in your work for the new Germany, Fräulein Sebastian," he told her.

She stood with downcast eyes, her heart aching with love of him and disappointment, full of admiration for his staunchness and despair at his apparent renunciation of earthly passions. With a faint sigh she murmured that she hoped he would not forget his promise—but at the moment he did not know what she meant. Later he remembered she had asked him for a few Soviet books, for she was beginning to study Russian. It all came back to him gradually much later—his promise to help her study Russian and her remark that she would "take the liberty of dropping in to see him some evenings."

As soon as she had gone Lubentsov sat down to write a letter to Tanya. He rarely gave way to his emotions in his letters to his wife, but now he poured out his heart to her. He implored her to leave the army and join him. It was an outrage, he wrote, that she should be detained all this time in Manchuria so long after the war had ended. He vowed that he could not live without her any longer and reproached her for writing so seldom. When a husband reproaches his wife for writing too seldom that does not necessarily mean that he is worried about her. As often as not it means that he is worried about himself.

For several days after this Lubentsov spent most of his time in the office. When he finally mustered the courage to stay at home, he sat waiting with fast beating heart, expecting her to come at any moment, fearing yet longing for it, until unable to endure the torment any longer he went back to the office.

He took to spending his free evenings downstairs with the soldiers. "Spending an evening in Russia," he called it. He liked it here in the warm and cosy soldiers' clubroom. The men sat about playing dominoes or draughts, talking about home and their war-time adventures. Lubentsov himself often told them stories about his scouts and about the courage and ingenuity of their present assistant platoon commander, Sergeant-Major Voronin. Sometimes he talked to them about the situation in Germany and the Soviet Government's policy in the German question. The men listened with great interest, flattered by his attention to them, and little suspecting how much their society meant to him at that moment.

Sometimes they sang Russian songs to Zuyev's accompaniment on the accordion. The singing brought tears to Lubentsov's eyes. One evening as he sat listening to the music Kasatkin came over and sat down beside him.

"What's the trouble, Sergei Platonovich?"

"Oh, I don't know," Lubentsov replied. "Nostalgia, I

suppose. I want to go home. There are lakes and rivers and forests here too, but I yearn for our own Russian lakes, rivers and forests. I never thought homesickness could be like this. I want to hear children speaking Russian. I want to go fishing in a Russian river. I want to be like everybody else, to go home from work with crowds of people like myself. And I want a home. I'm sick of feeling as if some stranger, some outsider with blurred features was looking over my shoulder all the time.... I'm sick of being called Herr, I want to be called Comrade."

Neither of them spoke for some time.

"Tired, Sergei Platonovich?" Kasatkin asked at last in a soft, gentle voice.

"I suppose so," Lubentsov confessed. He looked up at Kasatkin as he spoke and when he saw him slumped dejectedly on the sofa he realized that Kasatkin too must be very tired and that all that he, Lubentsov, had said applied perhaps just as much, if not more, to Kasatkin.

Yavorsky, who was sitting near them, sighed.

"Even a trade-union meeting seems a thrilling affair from here," he remarked.

"What about your family, Ivan Mitrofanovich?" Lubentsov asked after a while.

"They're coming," Kasatkin answered and his eyes lighted up. But he turned away at once to hide his happiness from Lubentsov who he knew was chafing at the delay over his wife's return.

Lubentsov felt a sudden rush of affection for all these people, his comrades, and reproached himself for not finding the time to get to know each of them more intimately so that he might share their joys and sorrows. He who knew hundreds of Germans by name realized to his shame that he could barely remember the names of the two dozen soldiers who lived beside him; even with the officers his relations were purely official.

"Come, let's go to my place," he said, getting up. "I have some wine and food. We can have a bite together."

He went out with Kasatkin, Yavorsky, Chokhov and Chegodayev, smiling to himself at the thought that in such company he need not fear the thought of Erika.

It was a moonlit night. Their footsteps echoed hollowly on the pavements of the silent, narrow streets. Being soldiers they instinctively walked in step and there was something soothing to Lubentsov in this rhythmic tread.

While he got supper ready his guests made themselves comfortable in the dining-room. Chokhov wandered into Lubentsov's study and sat down at his desk. As he did so his eye fell on an open notebook covered with writing. He glanced absently at the first few lines, and then began reading with interest.

This is what he read:

"MEMORANDUM OF A SOVIET COMMANDANT

"1. Self-interest is the worst failing a commandant can have. However brilliant an administrator he may be, however well he may know his district, if he is mercenary by nature he should be removed from his post at once.

"2. The great virtue for a commandant is integrity. He may be an indifferent administrator, he may be gifted with no more than average intelligence, but so long as he is not acquisitive he has the makings of a commandant.

"3. A man cannot be an angel, but a commandant must be the nearest thing to it. He must live strictly within his means, drink only at home, and never look at any other woman except his wife.

"4. A commandant must not always look grim and serious. A serious expression often conceals stupidity. But neither must he be a joker—facetiousness often conceals shallowness.

"5. A commandant is a revolutionary inasmuch as he represents a state and social system brought into being by revolution; as a revolutionary, it is his duty to uphold law and order, to respect and guard the customs of the given country, in order to rid the people of that country which is not yet ripe for revolution, of all fear of revolution.

"6. As a revolutionary his prime concern must be the interests of the working masses.

"7. The internal life of the commandant's office cannot long be concealed from the local population. Hence the commandant's office should have no secrets from the population other than purely official secrets.

"8. The commandant must be a diplomat, but only in his dealings with enemies. In his dealings with the population he is obliged to be brutally frank.

"9. The commandant is a teacher: he must not be afraid of repeating axioms.

"10. The commandant must see to it that the citizens of the area under his jurisdiction blame him personally if things go wrong, and credit Moscow for all the good. In this way they will respect the commandant for his candour and pluck and Moscow for having such loyal and devoted servants.

"11. The commandant must never forget that he represents the U.S.S.R. He must think of his country morning, noon and night. A day passed without a thought of his country is a day lost for the commandant. He must read the Soviet press from day to day. He should subscribe to the press of his native town or district. Of the classics he ought to read Tolstoi, Pushkin and Nekrasov as much as possible, and also Saltykov-Shchedrin, for he was a vice-governor himself and hence familiar with shortcomings in administration.

"12. The commandant's mode of life must be the Soviet mode both at home and at work.

"13. At the same time, he must learn the language, customs, culture and history of class struggle of the given country. This is beneficial not only for himself, but for the population, since it will help him to avoid making mistakes for which the population would ultimately have to pay.

"14. The commandant is always right inasmuch as he has the army behind him. Hence he must see to it that he *is* always in the right.

"15. The commandant is the master of the house, strict at times but always just.

"At the same time the commandant is also a guest, and as such he must respect his hosts who have been temporarily deprived of the right to manage their own affairs. He must remember that this was done for the sole purpose of helping them to regain that right.

"Lieutenant-Colonel S. Lubentsov

"Lauterburg, 1945."

Chokhov was re-reading the memo for the second time when Lubentsov came in.

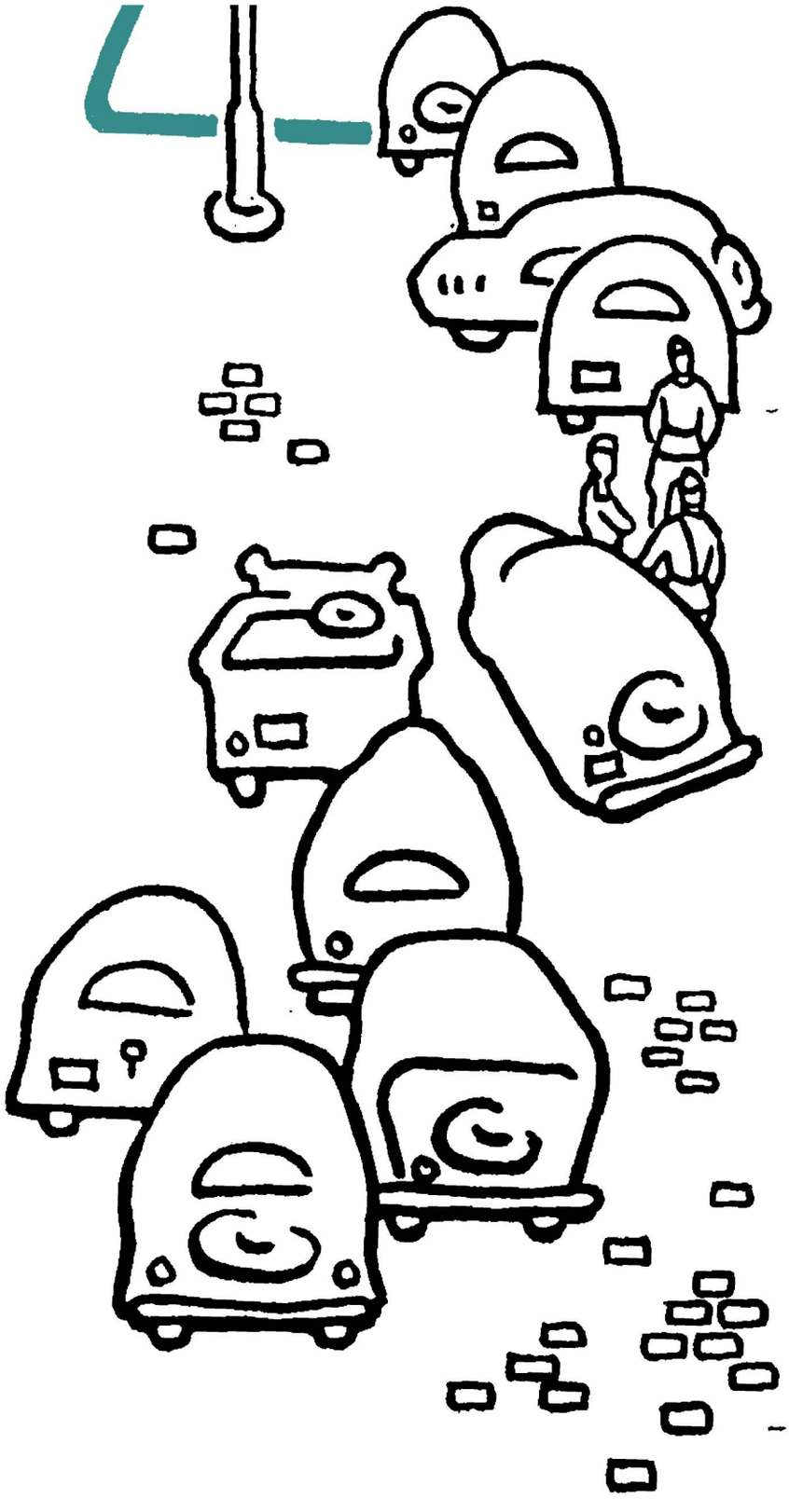
"Dash it, you mustn't read that rot!" he cried, turning very red.

"It isn't rot," said Chokhov quietly.

"Yes, it is," Lubentsov growled, then snatched up the pad and thrust it into a drawer. "The result of insomnia. 'The Confessions of a Second-Rate Commandant.' All right, forget it."

"No, I shan't forget it," replied Chokhov solemnly.

"Come on, supper's ready," said Lubentsov, leading the way to the dining-room.



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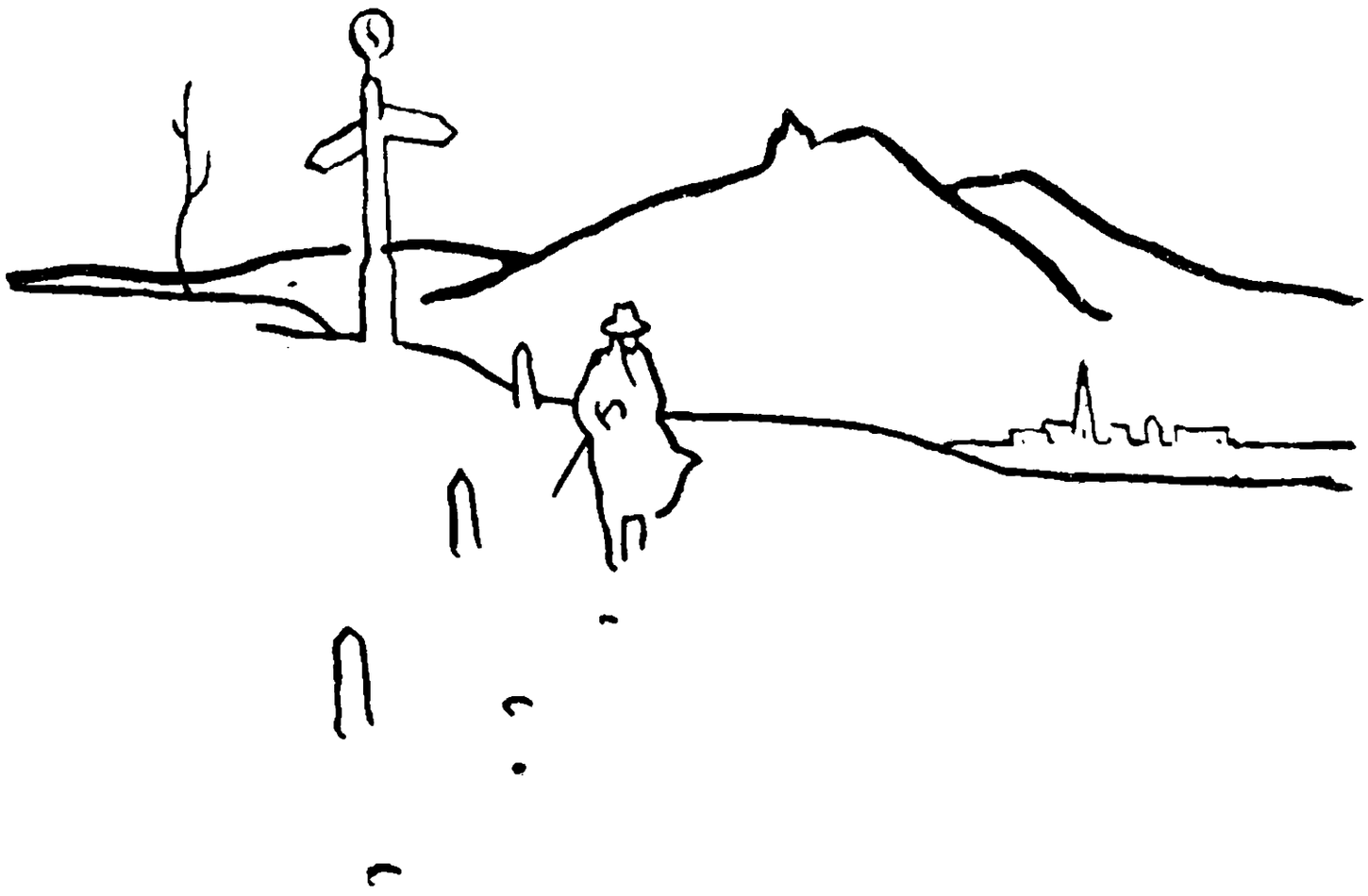
The Ordeal



1

The demarcation line between the Soviet and Western zones of occupation meandered across the Harz west of Brocken. Running through the bracken, past small mountain waterfalls, up the hills and down into the valleys, it was barely noticeable at first, but gradually it began to bristle with barbed wire, road blocks, and sentry boxes, to be guarded

on one side by Soviet patrols, and on the other by British and American—in the hills by Scots in kilts, and further south by Yanks in steel helmets and baggy trousers. Slowly but surely it was assuming all the features of an international frontier.

It was this frontier that ex-SS-man Fritz Bürcke crossed into the Soviet zone. Later, when the circumstances of his entry were being investigated, it was discovered that he had availed himself of a simple but clever device, and one which many Germans had resorted to before him. One evening, just before sunset, when the hill-tops were still crimson though the shadows had fallen in the valleys, Bürcke dived into one of these shadowy folds, made his way to a road, and walked, not in the direction of the Soviet side for which he was bound, but towards the American zone. The American sentry, finding that the tall, baldish German had no pass, turned him back and gave a shrill whistle. The Soviet soldier at the opposite road block answered with a lazy drawl: "Whaddye want?"

"A German from your side!" the American shouted across.

"Damn them for walking back and forth," the Russian grumbled. "Hey, get back where you came from," he growled, and Fritz Bürcke meekly obeyed and walked off slowly eastward into the Soviet zone.

The tall, baldish German wearing a threadbare coat and a bundle over his shoulder was seen later at an inn in Schirke in the hills where he stopped for the night. A week later he appeared in Blankenburg and the following day in Wernigerode. There the trail disappeared. It was not until much later, in the early spring, that he turned up in Lauterburg. This time he was dressed in the costume of a South Bavarian—suède shorts with straps over the shoulders and a grey jacket with green wool embroidery.

He dropped in for a beer at Pingel's and sat down in a far corner surveying the customers with a look of weary indifference in his small grey eyes. Pingel noticed him because he was a newcomer to Lauterburg, and perhaps also because, being something of a judge of character, Pingel was struck by a certain oddness about him. At any rate, he went over and offered him vodka in a whisper, for vodka was a treat he reserved exclusively for his close acquaintances or for very important personages. He was a little nettled by the casual nod with which Bürcke responded to his offer, for he had expected the stranger to show more gratitude.

Bürcke tossed off the drink and ordered another with the same casual air; he did not appear to know that vodka was one of the rarest of pleasures in these times. Pingel, however, brought him another wine-glass.

The restaurant was crowded, but although there were three vacant chairs at Bürcke's table no one took them. There was something about him that kept people away. Finally he beckoned to two girls who had strolled into the restaurant and were standing nearby waiting for an invitation. They flitted over at once, and sat down, thanking him profusely for his kindness. He made no reply but continued to drum his fingers on the table.

Bürcke invited the two ladies of easy virtue in order not to attract attention by sitting alone. After a while he paid his bill and was just about to leave the place when two stocky Russian soldiers wearing red arm-bands appeared in the doorway. It was the patrol. The sight of these two soldiers, each of whom was half his own size, threw Bürcke into a panic. He stared at them transfixed, unable to move a muscle. He always knew that he was afraid of the Russians, but he had not expected anything like the terror that now assailed him. I must take myself in hand, he told himself. He got up and walked slowly to the exit, going straight towards the soldiers who stood

near the entrance as if they had come inside to warm up. The proprietor limped over to them with an ingratiating smile and engaged them in conversation. Bürcke walked slowly past with as nonchalant an air as he could muster. Either because his face betrayed him or for some other reason, one of the soldiers glanced up at him and instead of stepping aside to let him pass, said to him in German:

"Your papers."

Bürcke stuck his hand into his breast pocket and felt for his papers, but the soldier stopped him with a gesture.

"*Komm*," he said.

The two soldiers followed him outside and down the street, keeping a few paces behind him. Bürcke's brain worked feverishly as he sought to explain to himself what had happened, why they had detained him and nobody else.

He turned a corner. On the right was a dark narrow side-street and for a moment he contemplated making a dash for it. But he decided that he would not try to escape for he was confident that his papers were in perfect order. Unless the Russians had exact information about him from some of their agents in Western Germany his detention was pure chance and he would be released at once. Hoping for the best, he walked on until he came to a square on which stood a big church and facing it a three-storey building flying the Soviet flag.

It turned out as he had anticipated: the patrol had had no particular reason for detaining him. Perhaps the restaurant proprietor had told them he was a stranger. At any rate, at the commandant's office, after a brief and casual inspection of his papers which identified him as a butcher from Eisenach on a business trip in Lauterburg, he was allowed to go.

Greatly relieved and a little weak in the knees from the nervous tension, he walked out of the office into the bright sunlight and suddenly stopped as if rooted to the ground. Coming across the square towards him from the direction of the church was a Russian officer. He was accompanied by two civilians, evidently Germans, and behind them at a respectful distance trailed a group of German urchins who appeared to be listening intently to what the Russian was saying to his companions. The children were holding long threads from which flew white paper kites.

There was nothing remarkable about the scene and Bürcke would have paid no attention to it had it not been for the officer's face. That face was familiar to Bürcke, horrifyingly familiar. He could have sworn that this was the very Russian whom he, Bürcke, had killed on May 2, 1945, in the woods west of Berlin—the man who had come carrying a white flag and demanded that he and the others who had been hiding with him in the thickets surrender. Captain Konrad Winkel, Bürcke's friend with whom he had shared the hardships of the retreat from Russia, had stepped forward with the intention of giving himself up, but Bürcke had prevented that by shooting both Winkel and that Russian officer. He had killed them both—of that he was positive. Yet here was this officer striding across the square, alive and well, talking and gesticulating with great animation. What made the apparition even more frightening was that group of German youngsters with their white paper kites walking behind the Russian, for then too, on May 2, the officer he had killed had also been followed by German boys carrying strips of white rag tied to poles.

Bürcke was superstitious, but not to such an extent as to believe that dead men could rise from their graves and walk across a square in broad daylight, talking and laughing. Yet there it was. That same blue-eyed Russian

officer with the white flag was coming straight towards Bürcke although he had not yet noticed him. Bürcke was so badly shaken that he staggered back a few steps and leaned weakly against a lamp-post. This involuntary movement caught the attention of the Russian officer and he looked straight at him. His eyes narrowed and he slowed down. Bürcke fully expected something awful and supernatural to happen at that moment. He expected the Russian officer to say, "You killed me and now I am going to kill you," or "Here you are at last, I have been waiting for you."

At last the Russian spoke.

"Are you waiting for *me*?" he asked.

Even this simple question seemed filled with dread meaning for Bürcke. But he managed to mumble a faint "no." Then he turned and walked off, slowly at first and then faster, hurrying blindly on until he reached the outskirts of the town and finally came to a stop at the foot of a hill on whose summit stood the gloomy pile of an ancient castle.

2

For Lubentsov too the encounter with the tall, round-shouldered, ruddy-complexioned German had been unpleasant though he could not have said why. He asked the officer on duty what the man had wanted. The man looked puzzled at first, but then he said:

"Oh, that one? Sergeant Veretennikov detained him in the Bratwurst restaurant. He's a stranger, a meat merchant from Eisenach. The sergeant didn't like the looks of him for some reason."

Lubentsov of course could hardly have connected the events that occurred afterwards in the Lauterburg area with the appearance of this German near the commandant's office. It soon became clear, however, that sabo-

tage of the land reform was organized and not confined to isolated cases as formerly.

A few days later Kasatkin went off to investigate the mysterious death of a number of horses formerly belonging to the local landlord. The animals had been distributed among the peasants, but had been kept as before in the stables of the estate. Kasatkin returned from this trip greatly discouraged. The loss of the horses had caused much bitter feeling among the peasants. They refused to believe that it was a mere accident. The German livestock experts, on the other hand, attributed it to the outbreak of some disease, but Kasatkin knew better. Kasatkin had worked in a Volga steppe district at the time when the kulaks had sabotaged collectivization, and he knew what foul deeds they were capable of when their property was threatened.

Professor Sebastian who, like the livestock experts, had no such experience in these matters and had not altogether lost his faith in the honesty of the German landowners and rich farmers, told Lubentsov and Kasatkin frankly that their suspicions reminded him of a detective novel and that in our time such fantastic crimes were out of the question.

"I know," he said, "that the word 'wrecking' is very popular in your country. But I refuse to believe that people deliberately commit such crimes. It is hard for me to imagine Frau von Melchior, for example, poisoning horses."

Lubentsov laughed as he tried to picture Frau von Melchior, who played Bach's *Wohltemperiertes Clavier* so beautifully, creeping out to her stables at dead of night with a vial of poison in her hand. Sebastian was probably right, the notion was absurd.

Nevertheless Kasatkin's suspicions proved to be justified.

If the deaths of the horses in the first two cases remained unexplained, the third occurred under circumstances which left no more room for doubt. Twelve milch cows were slaughtered in the village of Ulmendorf. The owner of the farm where they were stabled was found bound up in the cellar. He testified that at dawn that day three men had come to him, two in dark glasses, with their caps pulled down over their eyes and their collars turned up, and one wearing a mask. He declared they had ordered him to slaughter the cattle that had belonged to the local landlord, and when he had refused, had bound him up and done the deed themselves. Besides the landlord's cattle, a cow and two bull calves belonging to the peasant himself had been slaughtered.

The following morning the peasant's wife took a truckload of fresh meat to the town and sold it at black-market prices.

Within the next few days the same thing was done by many other rich peasants; instead of selling their quota of meat to the state, they secretly slaughtered a large quantity of cattle and took the meat to market—this time under no threat of violence from anyone or pretext of revenge for the requisition of the landlord's property.

Lubentsov set the whole police machine in motion. Police patrols were sent out on all the roads leading to town, black-marketeers were detained and their meat taken from them. The commandant's office took stock of all the cattle in the area. The slightest change in the number of head of cattle, any sickness among the livestock was investigated at once. Menshov now knew as much about the livestock in the district as the land department veterinaries, and as for the pedigree hogs and cows, bulls and stallions, he knew them by name.

The bürgermeisters were made personally responsible for any loss of livestock.

Lubentsov went around with the German veterinaries and livestock experts inspecting the herds and the pastures. He even began to dream of cattle, and on his frequent tours of the district he would stop the car not only when he saw people he wished to speak to, but when he saw a herd of horses, cows or sheep grazing in a meadow. He would jump out of the car and have a talk with the herdsmen, so that when he came to the village itself the peasants would be amazed to see how much he knew about their livestock. The peasant women jokingly maintained that he must be in league with the gnomes—the inhabitants of the mountain villages still believed in the "little mountain folk" as they called them.

The wholesale slaughter of livestock ceased. Here and there, however, incidents occurred which looked very much like organized sabotage. Lubentsov working together with Kasatkin, Menshov and Jost kept a special map on which all these incidents were recorded, and before long they had a pretty clear picture of the situation. Gradually the little flags encircled the flat section of the area, then gradually moved upland, disappeared for a time, to reappear on the territory of a *Kreis* farther to the south. One day Lubentsov showed his map to General Kuprianov.

The general, after hearing Lubentsov's report on the situation, pointed out that in other parts of the province these incidents did not occur with any regularity, nor did they suggest that they were committed by people moving from place to place. Nevertheless the general passed the information on to counter-intelligence and ordered immediate steps to be taken.

Thus began the hunt for Bürcke, with the German police taking part.

Although Bürcke successfully evaded capture, Lubentsov soon obtained quite accurate and detailed information about him. It was quite clear now that some experienced

spy, named for the records the "Werwolf General,"* was operating in the area.

Since after what had happened the appearance of any strangers was immediately reported to the commandant's office and the police by bürgermeisters, members of peasants' mutual aid committees and ordinary citizens, it was not long before Lubentsov was able to piece together a picture of a tall, slightly stoop-shouldered man with a ruddy complexion who had been seen in the vicinity of the places where the mischief had been done. One copper-mine foreman had seen a man of this description sleeping beside a waterfall. Two little peasant girls, taking dinner to their father, a cattleherd, had been startled by the sudden appearance of a red-faced man among the rocks. Marta Langheinrich, the bürgermeister's wife, had met a man very much like that one evening outside the village. He had been accompanied by two other men.

All this, however, was very indefinite. It was somewhat later that Lubentsov obtained more accurate information and from an entirely different quarter.

It was in connection with some alarming reports the commandant's office had received about one of the few schools that had lately been reopened. According to these reports, a junior-form teacher named Hänicke had been agitating his pupils against the land reform and against the Soviet Military Administration in general.

Lubentsov and Yavorsky drove out one day to the hill-country village where the school was situated. They looked up the bürgermeister first, had a talk with him and among other things asked how his school was progressing. The bürgermeister confessed that he did not know, he had been too busy with other matters. The schools were the concern of the district and regional educational

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* "Werwolf"—a secret organization formed by the nazis toward the end of the war for sabotage in the rear of the allies.

departments. Lubentsov scolded him a little for his negligence and invited him to accompany them on a visit to the school.

Lessons had just ended when they arrived. The director gave the visitors a cordial welcome—he was an acquaintance of Lubentsov, an honest and intelligent man and a candidate member of the Party. After a few routine questions about the system of study, Yavorsky asked the director if he was satisfied with his teaching staff, were all the teachers qualified for their jobs and were they all quite loyal. The director replied that he had no complaints to make on that score.

At that moment one of the teachers entered the room. He was a short, scraggy man with a pale, haughty face.

"That's him," Lubentsov concluded. But he was wrong. The teacher introduced himself as Kornelius. He taught mathematics and physics in the senior classes.

At the commandant's request the director summoned the entire staff. Hänicke, somewhat to Lubentsov's surprise, turned out to be a stout man with a good-humoured expression, very affable and a trifle smug.

Yavorsky asked the teachers about their work, inquired whether they needed anything and whether they were satisfied with the new textbooks.

He told them that the commandant wanted to know whether their present work fully accorded with the decisions of the Potsdam Conference, whether they were giving their pupils a sufficiently clear idea of the tasks confronting the German people, of how nazism had brought Germany to the brink of disaster and how important it was for the Germans to embrace democratic traditions.

The teachers hummed and hawed and avoided answering the question directly. Only Hänicke, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, shrugged his shoulders, spread out his hands and said they were doing their best.

At this point Lubentsov intervened.

"Now take yourself, Herr Hänicke. How do you conduct your lessons? Do you illustrate what you teach by facts from present-day life? To be more concrete, do you tell your pupils anything about the land reform?"

Hänicke hesitated a moment or two before replying as if to collect his thoughts. He fixed his slightly bulging eyes on the commandant. Perhaps he was trying to read his thoughts, to discover whether the question was innocent or whether there was something behind it. The commandant's face was inscrutable. He appeared to be awaiting Hänicke's reply with polite interest.

"As a rule, not," Hänicke replied at last. "It is not always expedient, pedagogically speaking."

"As a rule you don't," repeated Lubentsov. "But are there any exceptions to that rule?"

His insistence was becoming suspicious, and a hush fell over the room. Since Hänicke made no reply, Lubentsov went on, addressing the others:

"Herr Hänicke considers it unpedagogical to support the measures of the democratic parties and the directives of the Soviet Administration. But, Herr Hänicke," he turned to the teacher again, "do you not think that your pupils might think it strange that their teacher, the man whom they are supposed to trust and to whom they confide their thoughts and feelings, should avoid one of the most burning issues of the day? As a rule, I mean. Will the pupils not feel that their teacher avoids these issues because he does not share the views of the democratic parties and the Military Administration on the problems facing Germany today, problems every German child is aware of? Don't you think, Herr Hänicke, that deliberate avoidance of politics is also politics?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Hänicke said, looking thoughtful. "It might indeed be interpreted in that light."

It was this assumed thoughtfulness that enraged Lubentsov more than anything else. In spite of his rich ex-

perience in talking with all sorts of people, including many who did not share his own political views, he had never come across such barefaced hypocrisy. But Hänicke himself no longer interested him so much as the other teachers. With something like despair he looked from one to the other, from the elderly man with the grey hair to the young woman, from the young woman to the scraggy mathematics teacher and from him to the director—his eyes asking the mute question: You all knew about him and yet you kept silent? Is it possible that the only difference between him and you is that you are more cautious than he? Could similar reports perhaps have been made about yourselves, but he was caught while you were not? If you find out about him will you turn from him in disgust and horror and if so, will your disgust and horror be genuine? Can you be trusted with the education of the young generation of Germans so that they will grow up to be men and women who will not look upon other nations with hatred and contempt?

And perhaps to obtain an immediate answer to these unspoken questions he asked Hänicke point-blank what he would think of a teacher who did not only avoid telling his pupils about the most pressing problems of contemporary life but who expressed himself openly in opposition to all that was being done to ensure a sound and healthy way of life for Germany. In other words, if the teacher told his pupils that their parents must not take the land belonging to the landlords, if he told the children of new settlers that the land they had been given had been stolen, and, finally, if he threatened the children with punishment in this world and the next?

The change that took place in Hänicke within the space of a few moments was frightful to behold. Neither he nor the others could doubt any longer the implication of the commandant's words.

"Have you nothing to say?" Lubentsov asked, glancing at the man's trembling cheeks. "Then permit me to inform you that we regard such a person as an avowed opponent of the Soviet occupation policy and an enemy of the German people."

Were the other teachers indignant and dismayed at these disclosures? Lubentsov thought that they were, that they looked at Hänicke with amazement and at any rate with disapproval. But now, after the Hänicke incident, Lubentsov felt that they too were not to be trusted and only on the way back to Lauterburg did he reproach himself for this attitude knowing it to be fraught with the danger of distrusting everybody, a terrible danger which invariably has dire consequences for all concerned. And he thought with gratitude of the many Germans, sincere, open-hearted people who were devoting themselves heart and soul to building a new life in their beautiful and long-suffering country.

3

On returning that evening to the office, Lubentsov could not make up his mind whether he ought to arrest Hänicke or whether it would be better simply to remove him from his job. Kasatkin was in favour of arresting the man. Yavorsky was not sure.

Left alone, Lubentsov looked over the papers that had arrived in the course of the day. Among them was an excerpt from the proceedings of the military tribunal stating that Sergeant Beletsky had been sentenced to two years in a disciplinary battalion. Why, Lubentsov asked himself, had he not hesitated to punish this young man, while here, when it was a matter of prosecuting an avowed enemy, he wavered and was prepared to seek the advice of all and sundry. Was it because he wished with all his heart that his own people might do no wrong, be-

cause every misdemeanour on their part hurt and angered him, whereas the Germans had done so much wrong that he still in his heart of hearts expected the worst of them? Was that, perhaps, why Hänicke's treachery angered him, or at any rate hurt him, less than the Beletsky affair?

He wrote a warrant for the arrest of Hänicke. But before turning it over, he drove out, late as it was, to see Leonov and ask his advice.

When he reached Felsenstein, however, he was told that Leonov's wife had arrived. Lubentsov, conscious of a sharp pang of envy at his comrade's good fortune, decided not to bother him with his troubles and went back to Lauterburg.

On the way back something happened which strengthened his resolve to arrest Hänicke. A car passed him en route. The driver dipped his headlights, and as the car swept past Lubentsov caught a brief glimpse of a round-faced, heavily-built German with a tense expression, who reminded him of Hänicke, reminded him that there existed another Germany beyond the demarcation line, a Germany where no reforms had been carried out and where people like Hänicke wished to be.

At home Lubentsov found Professor Sebastian awaiting him. The professor looked a trifle worried. Taking an envelope from his pocket he pulled out a letter and handed it to Lubentsov. The message consisted of a few typewritten words: "If the Russian flunkey Herr Sebastian will not stop working for those whom he is helping to steal land and property belonging to other people, he will get what he deserves. We are at our posts." Underneath was the crude drawing of an acorn.

Lubentsov laughed, not too convincingly because he was seriously alarmed, but his laughter evoked an answering smile from Sebastian.

"I knew that you would laugh," he said, "and you did not disappoint me."

"Don't you think this looks like a detective story?" Lubentsov said with a sly twinkle. "Yet it isn't fiction at all, it is a struggle, a very bitter struggle, and quite deadly, too."

And he told Sebastian about the Hänicke affair.

"We shall have to arrest him," he wound up.

Sebastian said nothing.

"Let's hear what Jost says about your letter," Lubentsov proposed.

He telephoned to the police department. Jost arrived a few minutes later.

"Don't you think it is time the police were armed?" he said, when he had read the anonymous note. "My men are all right. I can vouch for them."

"Very well, arm them," Lubentsov agreed. "The matter has already been taken up with SMAG. Consider it settled."

Jost livened up at this.

"Then will you give instructions to issue pistols?" he asked.

"Now look here, Jost," Lubentsov exclaimed, "do you mean to say there are no fire-arms left in Germany? Seek and you shall find, Comrade Jost. . . ."

Jost chuckled. "All right," he said. "If that's the case, I daresay we'll find some weapons. It isn't easy to fool you."

"There are plenty of fire-arms in the river-bottom under every bridge, or hidden in the forests," Lubentsov explained to the bewildered Sebastian. "You only need to clean the rust off them."

Sebastian and Jost rose to leave. Lubentsov whispered to Jost as he showed him out, "Not a hair of the professor's head must be touched, you understand, Jost?"

A few days later Kasatkin came into Lubentsov's office

with the news that there had been an inquiry from Halle about the teacher Hänicke.

"Some newspaper in the Rhineland came out with the story that we are putting intellectuals behind the bars. Our chiefs have got the wind up. They want to know whether we had enough grounds for arresting him."

"What did you tell them?"

"I said we had, of course. But you and I are to go over to SMAG tomorrow morning to explain."

"Very well, we'll explain! That's how we do things. Either we don't care what anybody says, or else we suddenly get sensitive about the outpourings of every rotten little sheet abroad. The case is being investigated, isn't it? What have they found to date?"

"The man's guilty all right. What's more he's tied up with a lot of other people on both sides of the demarcation line. He has given some interesting information. Among other things he has confirmed his connection with an important fascist who is directing the sabotage of our Administration's measures. He is somewhere in our district."

"Thank God," Lubentsov said with a sigh of relief. "I was beginning to get worried."

So the red-faced man really did exist. The whole district was alerted. But after Hänicke's arrest, or perhaps because of it, the "Werwolf General" vanished. Lubentsov sincerely regretted his disappearance. It would be a great pity if the man had managed to escape to the other side of the demarcation line and thus elude punishment.

At any rate everything became quiet and peaceful again. The preparation of seed for the spring sowing began. The new peasants and those who had received land allotments for the first time worked on their plots with a will, taking an increasing interest in the reform and gradually forgetting their fear of the landlords' revenge. And when the time came for them to pay the first instal-

ment on the land they were even more elated. The instalment was small, but it was an instalment nevertheless, a definite sign that the land had been *bought* and not taken. And the peasants cheerfully knocked in wooden stakes marking the border-line of their land, their own land, bought and paid for.

The red-faced intruder had vanished.

4

Vorobeitsev came to see his new friend Merker one day and found there a tall, ruddy-complexioned, bald-headed man dressed in a black suit which gave him the appearance of a clergyman. Merker introduced the "Herr Kapitän" to the "priest" as Vorobeitsev mentally dubbed the red-faced stranger.

"How goes it?" Vorobeitsev asked Merker. "Have you got me that Nash yet? The racing car you told me about, with red leather upholstery."

"Yes, yes, Herr Kapitän," Merker assured him.

Vorobeitsev's eyes shone.

"Take me to it," he said. He followed Merker out of the house.

"Who's that?" Vorobeitsev asked when they were outside.

"A friend of mine," Merker replied. "Or rather a friend of my friends. He has come from Thuringia on business."

"What does he deal in?"

"Oh, all sorts of . . . er . . . furniture and . . . er . . . property."

"He doesn't live in Suhl by any chance? Does he sell shotguns?"

"It's possible. I shall ask him. I didn't know you were interested in shotguns."

"Of course I am."

When they returned to the house after inspecting the

racing car Merker had procured for Vorobeitsev, the "priest" was sitting in the same attitude by the table rubbing his large hands together as if to warm them. He was not scared this time. This Russian was not frightening. He walked about the room, tall, lanky, nervous, deliberately brusque in his manner. The "priest" chatted pleasantly with him. He asked him about Lieutenant-Colonel "von Lubentsoff," and on learning that the Russian captain was interested in shotguns he declared that at the first opportunity, as soon as he received the consignment of goods he was waiting for, he wished to have the pleasure of presenting the captain with a three-barrelled combination shotgun and rifle, specially made for big game hunting. Vorobeitsev had never seen a gun like that and was delighted.

The Russian captain spoke German quite fluently and the "priest" would have felt quite at ease with him were it not for the cap with the scarlet band and the large red star in front that lay on the table between them. He felt weak in the knees whenever he looked at it. But after a while Merker lifted the cap gently with both hands as if it were alive and laid it carefully on the sideboard to enable Frau Merker to lay the table. After that the "priest" felt much better. He even patted Vorobeitsev's knee once or twice in friendly fashion, secretly congratulating himself for having done something he would not have dreamed of doing an hour before. He felt that he had completely conquered his terror of "them."

Bürcke, like Lubentsov, also dreamed of cows, horses, lambs and calves at this period. But while Lubentsov dreamed of live cattle, Bürcke saw them floundering in blood. He dreamed of destroying all the cattle in the Soviet zone and thus causing a famine, for famine was the best ally of those who had sent him here.

Frau Merker came in carrying a huge platter of roast mutton.

"Our last meat," said Merker ruefully. "Those two sheep you were so kind as to give us are all gone, Herr Kapitän. I don't know what we shall do now."

"All right," said Vorobeitsev, "don't worry. I'll let you have something in return for that car you got me. I'll tell them to send you some sugar straight from the refinery. Don't be afraid. You won't lose any weight," he said to Merker's wife, slapping her thigh.

"Oh," she cried, bending over and throwing her arms around Vorobeitsev. "*Lieber Kerl*!"

"Here, let's do this properly," cried Vorobeitsev stirred by the embrace. "Where's the vodka? Come on, out with it! Don't worry, I'll send you some more when this is gone."

The "priest" carefully helped himself to some mutton, looking thoughtfully at the meat and glancing up from time to time at Vorobeitsev. As he listened to the conversation, nodding his head approvingly and sometimes laughing at the Russian captain's witticisms, his tension relaxed and he came to the conclusion that not all Russians were so terrible. This one, at any rate, seemed the happy-go-lucky type and quite harmless.

Unlike most of the Germans who had spoken to Bürcke about the commandant, Vorobeitsev, he noticed, did not speak too respectfully of Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov. It was not so much what he said as the tone in which he spoke. One felt that Vorobeitsev was annoyed by the curiosity of this German, the fact that a complete stranger to the town should display such an interest in the commandant. He had no intention of speaking ill of the Soviet commandant in the presence of these Germans whoever they were, if only for the very reason that they were Germans, but he was incapable of hiding his dislike for his chief. He at once turned the conversation to himself. The more he drank, the more he bragged about himself, let-

ting it be understood that he was a "big shot" in the commandant's office, that everything depended on him, and the chiefs in Halle and even in Berlin preferred him to all the other officers. Unconsciously, he did what most drunks and braggarts do: he repeated Lubentsov's words, described Lubentsov's actions, but in each case he substituted himself for Lubentsov. And because deep down in his heart he was conscious of this fraud, he hated Lubentsov and pitied himself all the more.

"Let's drink!" he kept shouting in Russian, proposing one and the same toast over and over again: "Here's to our meeting under the table!"

He explained to his companions the meaning of the toast and they roared with laughter and began shouting it themselves in broken Russian.

Merker and Bürcke drank out of ordinary wine-glasses but Vorobeitsev drank his vodka by the tumblerful, much to the Germans' surprise. Noticing that their surprise flattered him, they deliberately emphasized it.

"Let's drink!" Vorobeitsev shouted again, clinking glasses with the two Germans. This time, however, Merker declared that he had had enough. Whereupon Vorobeitsev without saying a word picked up a freshly-opened bottle of vodka and flung it carelessly out of the open window.

"Now will you drink?" he demanded, his hand on the neck of another unopened bottle.

"*Ja . . . Ja,*" murmured the frightened Merker, and tossed off his drink without more ado.

Bürcke's face wore a strained smile. Vorobeitsev's drunken antics were beginning to frighten him. Merker fussed about nervously trying to mollify the Russian. He did not want to attract attention to his apartment.

At last Vorobeitsev quieted down and allowed himself to be put to bed on the couch. The others too went to bed. But Merker could not sleep for worry that someone might

complain to the police, or, still worse, to the commandant's office. And when late at night he heard a knock at the door, he was almost paralysed with fright. He tried to waken Vorobeitsev, but without success. Bürcke, who had been awakened by the knocking, was already up and dressing quickly. Merker, pale-faced and trembling, went to open the door. To his great relief he heard voices speaking English behind the door, and when he opened it, two Americans entered. They were both strangers to him, but one of them mentioned the name of O'Sullivan and Merker's fears were allayed. The one who had spoken, a tall man with large expressionless eyes, surveyed the half-dark room, the table with the overturned bottles, and grunted. When his eyes fell on the figure lying on the couch he went over, bent down and said:

"Hey, Victor!"

He quickly shook Vorobeitsev awake but it was some time before the latter recognized him.

"How did you get here?" Vorobeitsev cried in amazement.

For it was White, the same Frank White whom Vorobeitsev had met during the Potsdam Conference. That he should have turned up here seemed nothing short of miraculous. Not that he was any too glad to renew the acquaintance. But White was slapping him on the shoulder chummily and repeating a strange word which Vorobeitsev took to be some form of American greeting. It was some time before he realized that White was trying to pronounce the Russian words *Mir tesen*, meaning "it's a small world."

"Yes, it's a small world," said Vorobeitsev without enthusiasm.

The other American in the meantime had been helping himself to the contents of one of the vodka bottles and now stretched himself out in Vorobeitsev's place on the couch. Merker brought Bürcke in from the next room and

they sat down to some more drinking. More toasts ensued, White acting as toast-master. They drank to Russia and to the United States.

"Here's to Germany," said White with a sidelong glance at Bürcke.

They drank.

"And now let's drink to Britain and France," proposed Vorobeitsev, quite tipsy again.

But White refused to drink to Britain and France.

"Very well, here's to our meeting under the table," proposed Merker, and White, after he had understood the toast, laughed so that he very nearly choked on his wine. Then he suddenly turned dead serious and stared fixedly before him, his lips moving.

"What became of that pal of yours, that nice Captain," he asked Vorobeitsev after a pause.

"I don't see him any more."

"Gone back to Russia?"

"No, he's here," Vorobeitsev replied frowning.

"Quarrelled? Over a woman, eh?"

But he could get nothing out of Vorobeitsev except an incoherent mumble.

"He was a good guy," said White. "You and I are no good. We're rotten. We ought to be hanged." He spoke evenly, his face expressionless. "By the way, Major Collins sends you his regards. He likes you. Says you're a good guy."

These last words sobered Vorobeitsev at once. Until now he had thought White's coming here was mere chance, but this mention of Collins made him glance at White in alarm. Soon afterwards he got up, saying that it was time for him to be going. It was almost light outside. People were beginning to appear in the streets.

"Will you come again?" White asked him. "Drop over this evening. Or shall I come to you? I can if you like. At home or at the office?"

"No," said Vorobeitsev. "I'll come here."

He went over to the mirror, pulled down his tunic, buttoned it up, straightened out his crumpled shoulder-straps and put on his cap. The sight of his own reflection in the mirror had a sobering effect on him. His uniform reminded him that he belonged to the army of a great power and that filled him with self-confidence. At the same time—for the one followed from the other—he had a revulsion of feeling for his three drinking companions, whom he now regarded with suspicion and loathing. At that moment, which might have been his salvation, his eyes were almost opened, and he saw with sudden insight that the American was far closer to these Germans than to himself, and that all three were in league to enmesh and destroy him, Vorobeitsev.

As these fragmentary thoughts flashed through his mind, he wished more fervently than ever before to be like Chokhov, who was in his thoughts much more frequently than he had realized, especially now after White himself had praised him and shown the gulf that now divided the two friends.

"You have no business being here," he said in the dry, abrupt manner of Chokhov. "If you are bound for Berlin you are off your route."

But though he had imitated Chokhov's manner of speaking, his conscience was not clear. And as he met the cold stare of the American's large, colourless eyes and noted Merker's long white hands stretched out on the table, Vorobeitsev gave a forced laugh and said:

"I was joking. Okay. I'll be seeing you." He went outside. On the stairs he almost collided with a short elderly German whose face seemed familiar. He had met him once at Merker's place and had seen him a few times near the commandant's office.

5

After roaming about the streets for a while, Vorobeitsev went to the commandant's office, and since it was still very early, he entered through the back door which led to the quarters occupied by the platoon. Chokhov and the platoon commander lived in one of the rooms in this part of the building.

Both were up when Vorobeitsev arrived. They were washing at the sink and doing it with such gusto that Vorobeitsev decided to follow their example; he washed splashing the water about without being afraid to let it drip behind his shirt collar or wet his rolled-up sleeves.

Afterwards they sat down to breakfast. The food was rough soldier's fare—buckwheat porridge with pork fat. Vorobeitsev had no appetite for it but he ate it nevertheless in order to do as the others did. Soon they were joined by Voronin who told them that Lubentsov had spent the night in his office owing to pressure of work. Chokhov filled a bowl of porridge for the commandant and Voronin took it upstairs before rejoining the others at the breakfast table.

Vorobeitsev began to talk about going home. It was high time they were returning, he said, he was sick to death of this damn Germany.

Chokhov looked at him in surprise. He had never heard such sentiments from Vorobeitsev before. But Vorobeitsev's voice rang with sincerity and he stared before him with a look of misery in his eyes that might indeed have been mistaken for homesickness.

Chokhov advised him to turn in an application to Lubentsov, and to go and see him now before the workday began and have a talk with him.

"I think I will," Vorobeitsev said. He got up, but changed his mind and sat down again and began talking

about something else. He was suddenly afraid to go home. He had grown too accustomed to the easy life here. At home food was still rationed and he would have to work hard, perhaps in the war-wrecked regions.

"Listen, you fellows," he said, "I've found a car here that will make your eyes pop out. A beauty! It's a racing car, a two-seater with the snappiest lines you ever saw. It's all engine. Eight cylinders. And the seats are upholstered in fancy red leather. You never saw anything like it. It can do one hundred and eighty an hour easily. Only I don't know whether to keep it for myself or give it to someone, General Kuprianov, for instance. Of course it's not a car for a plain captain. I'll bring it over this evening and let you see it."

"Where do you get all these things from?" Voronin wanted to know. "It's high time the lieutenant-colonel had a decent car, too."

"Ah, the lieutenant-colonel," Vorobeitsev laughed. "He doesn't care about such things. I could get him anything he wanted. He only has to say the word. I'll be seeing a fellow who knows about such things this evening and I'll see what can be done."

"A slick chap that," remarked Voronin when Vorobeitsev had gone.

Breakfast over, Voronin went outside. The car was waiting to take him to Altstadt on an errand for the platoon commander. Kranz was standing in his usual place under the street lamp.

"Want to come along?" Voronin invited him.

"I don't mind."

They climbed into the car and drove off. It was an old Wanderer, very much the worse for wear, and its coughing and spluttering reminded Voronin of what Vorobeitsev had said that morning.

"Time we got a new car. The commandant ought to have something better than this old rattletrap."

"The police can get a suitable car for the Herr Kommandant," said Kranz. "Tell Herr Jost."

"Captain Vorobeitsev tells me he has a handsome new sport car. Now where could he have got a thing like that?"

Kranz knew at once where Vorobeitsev had obtained the car. Early that morning he had met him coming out of Merker's flat. Kranz had some business dealings with Merker, for whom he acted as a sort of broker, executing diverse minor commissions. But he had no love for Merker and he knew many things about Merker's past that would have seriously compromised the latter had Kranz chosen to inform the authorities. However, he kept his counsel. The fact that the Russian officer had spent the night at Merker's disgusted Kranz. His disgust turned to amazement when he found two Americans in Merker's flat and a strange German, obviously a Bavarian, judging by his accent.

Kranz felt that this was none of his business, that Captain Vorobeitsev was at liberty to associate with whomever he pleased. Unlike Voronin or Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov, Kranz saw nothing wrong in doing a little business on the side. But he knew Voronin and Lubentsov did. He knew how much the lieutenant-colonel disapproved of such dealings. Glancing sideways at Voronin's small-featured face with its narrow Tatar eyes under the thin jet-black brows, Kranz decided that he ought to warn the commandant's office.

He had his own reasons for doing so. He wanted to do the Russians a good turn. And he wanted his fellow-countrymen to think well of Russia. But there was no political conviction behind that desire. The private life of Captain Vorobeitsev, of which Lauterburg was not altogether ignorant, revolted Kranz, although many Germans considered it quite natural and only human. Kranz, too, might have thought it natural had he not read Russian

newspapers and books and had he not known Lubentsov and Voronin. But he did know them and he knew them much better than they supposed. In general there was little that he did not know.

Perhaps the Russians themselves hardly realized how conspicuous they were. Whenever the Germans had anything derogatory to say about the Russians, they invariably mentioned Captain Vorobeitsev. Those Russians, they would say, talked about socialism so much and were always bragging about having built it in their own country, but when you got to know them better you saw that it was all eyewash. Look at that Captain Vorobeitsev, for example.

Good is always less conspicuous than evil.

Kranz talked little. He did not want to broach the subject in the presence of the German chauffeur, who understood a little Russian. The conversation dealt with neutral topics.

"What's your first name?" Voronin asked him.

"Paul."

"Paul Kranz?"

"Yes. In Russian it is Pavel."

"Is it? Go on! You mean to say German names have Russian equivalents?"

"Yes. Nearly all."

Voronin was much interested.

"What's Ivan in German?"

"Johann. And the diminutive Vanya is Hans."

"You don't say! And what was your father's name?"

"Thomas."

"What's that in Russian?"

"Foma."

Voronin burst out laughing.

"So that makes you Pavel Fomich?"

"Yes," Kranz smiled. "That's what my wife used to call me."

"And what's my name in German?"

"Demetrius."

"That sounds like it, only it's harder to pronounce. What about Yekaterina Fyodorovna?"

"Katarina. Fyodor is Theodor."

"Well, well!"

This kept them occupied until they reached Altstadt. It was when they were at the warehouse where Voronin was being issued the supplies for the platoon that Kranz casually mentioned Vorobeitsev's connections with the black market—for there was a black market in Lauterburg as everywhere else at that time.

Voronin's eyebrows shot up for an instant. But he gave no other sign.

"Perhaps that's his job," he said calmly. "You'd better mind your own business, Pavel Fomich."

Kranz was deeply offended. He kept silent all the way back, failing to respond even when Voronin made one or two attempts to start a conversation—not about Vorobeitsev, of course, but about various other topics, chiefly names.

When they reached Lauterburg Voronin got out at the commandant's house and returned in a few moments with several packets of cigarettes for Kranz. But although Kranz was a confirmed smoker and always in need of cigarettes, this time he flatly refused to take the offering and hurried away. Voronin looked after him for a long time. Then the glanced at the cigarettes and concluded that Kranz's warning might be much more important than he had thought at first.

The second warning came from a most unexpected source.

A trainload of repatriates was due to leave the following day for the Soviet Union. Ksenia went to the station to see them off, for many were friends with whom she had shared her first miserable years in Germany. Chokhov,

whom Lubentsov had delegated to represent the commandant's office at the station, caught sight of Ksenia as he walked down the platform. She was standing beside the train with a group of young men and women among whom he recognized the broad shoulders of the one-legged man.

Chokhov frowned but did not go over to them. He paced slowly down the platform looking into the cars to see that everything was in order. People came up to him complaining that all the carriages were full to overflowing but one carriage at the end of the train was empty and for some reason locked. Chokhov had it unlocked at once and the passengers poured in.

Coming back from the tail end of the train Chokhov noticed Ksenia and the one-legged man walking up and down slowly along the platform away from the others engrossed in conversation. The cripple had laid his big hand on Ksenia's shoulder and was talking to her earnestly. Chokhov felt a sharp stab of jealousy. He looked at them only once, but those two faces, very grave and bent slightly forward, seemed to engrave themselves on his memory.

Chokhov walked past them. The locomotive came puffing up the line. Two workers in oil-stained overalls came out of the station building and walked slowly over to the head of the train. Chokhov went after them and stood watching them couple the locomotive to the train. There was a loud clanking noise. The engine driver stuck his head out of the cab, looked back down the train and shouted something in German. Chokhov started at the sound: he could not get used to the idea of Germans at peaceful occupations. The war had left too deep an imprint on him.

A heavy jolt passed down the length of the train. The engine panted loudly. Everything was ready. Chokhov turned and went back to the centre of the train. The sta-

tion-master came up to him and said something. Chokhov did not understand what he said, although by now he knew German quite well. He did not even hear what the man was saying because he had caught sight of Ksenia and the one-legged man again. They had rejoined the others. Just then Ksenia noticed Chokhov and hurried over to him. The station-master went on talking. Chokhov nodded absently.

"Captain Chokhov," said Ksenia, "the comrades want to see you."

"All right," he said and went back with her to the group. The one-legged man was there too.

Everyone was very excited and there were tears in many eyes. The cripple came up to Chokhov and held out his hand:

"Please convey our thanks to the commandant," he said. "From all of us and from me personally, to him and to all the comrades at the commandant's office. Good-bye and good luck."

"Thanks, I'll tell them," said Chokhov stiffly.

The one-legged man kept shaking his hand and looking into his eyes. His face, usually so grim, was radiant.

"Take care of Ksenia," he said in a low voice.

"Gosha, give us a chance to say good-bye too," one of the girls intervened and the cripple reluctantly let go of Chokhov's hand. Now the others shook hands with him in turn.

Chokhov wished them a pleasant journey. His moodiness had vanished as soon as the cripple had mentioned Ksenia. The words had been addressed to him personally, they were words a man might have said entrusting his sister to the care of her betrothed. As Chokhov realized this the colour rushed to his face.

Ksenia stood a little aside. Her lips were slightly parted so that you could not tell whether she was smiling wanly or on the verge of tears. And then she began to cry quietly. The tears welled up in her eyes and rolled

down her cheeks. She did not attempt to wipe them away or hide her face. She continued to gaze steadily before her.

"Have you chosen someone to take charge?" Chokhov asked the others, mindful as usual of his duties. But his heart was bursting with joy, the joy that is given man to experience perhaps once or twice in a lifetime.

"Gosha will be in charge," someone said.

Chokhov nodded for he knew in advance that the one-legged man was the one best fitted for the job and that he was bound to have been chosen.

Though the man bore little resemblance to Lubentsov, yet Chokhov was somehow reminded of his chief at that moment, perhaps because had Lubentsov been in similar circumstances he too would have been elected to take charge, and he too would be the one to whom everybody would turn for advice. And what about himself? Could he be like that? Was he capable of devoting himself to the common good and yet remain wholly himself, unlike anyone else? He doubted it. Chokhov in spite of his pride had no illusions about himself.

In the meantime, the station-master announced that the train was ready for departure. The cripple, his peg-leg tapping loudly against the stone platform, moved away from the others as if he suddenly discovered that he needed room, and raising his hand, he cried:

"Attention! All aboard!"

Then he went over to Chokhov, gave him a swift hug, and after another quick hug for Ksenia limped over to the train. A man with an accordion sitting on the steps of his carriage struck up a popular Soviet song. The cripple hopped on to the step and squeezed past the accordion-player into the doorway of the carriage. For half a minute he stood with his back to the station, then he turned slowly round, took off his hat and waved it. Chokhov and Ksenia looked at him and he smiled back at them with a shy, painful smile.

The train pulled out of the station. Soon the music and the singing faded and Chokhov and Ksenia were left on the empty platform. They stood for a minute or two, then turned and walked slowly out on to the station square where Chokhov's motor-cycle was waiting.

6

"Let's go for a ride out of town," Ksenia suggested when they were settled on the motor-cycle. "I have something to say to you."

Chokhov started the engine and within a few minutes they were in the hills. Stopping at a quiet spot near some pine-trees, Chokhov got off and helped Ksenia down.

Now she is going to tell me something about that one-legged chap, Chokhov thought.

"Gosha asked me to tell you this," Ksenia began, and Chokhov could tell by her voice that she was upset. "Yesterday he went to see a German who lives in Gneisenaustrasse not far from here. He was asked to go. Some American had brought him a letter from one of our people, a Russian, over there in the West—a man named Tsapailo. I don't know much about him, except that he must have had something on his conscience, because when he heard that the Red Army was coming he ran away to the West. He went away at night without telling anyone. It's true that he often used to say that most likely we'd all be put in jail when we got home for having been on enemy territory. Everyone was always trying to scare us with that. The British kept harping on it and so did the Americans. Evidently Tsapailo got frightened. In the letter he sent Gosha through this American officer he begged him to go over to the West. He said Gosha would be well off there, that he would fix him up. Well, this American officer—he speaks Russian quite well, but Gosha doesn't know his name—told Gosha that

he had an official permit for him issued by the American command so he could leave right away. But Gosha said he would think it over; he was afraid to refuse right off because they might kill him to prevent him from telling the whole story. Gosha told me to tell you," she went on after a brief pause, "that Vorobeitsev often visits that German. They have some sort of shady business dealings, black-marketing of course. Vorobeitsev uses his official position to provide the German with all sorts of goods in short supply and the German gets him the things he wants in return. Gosha asked you to let Comrade Lubentsov know about it. Of course Gosha didn't want to be mixed up in the affair. He just wanted to warn you to keep your eyes open. But if you need him to give evidence he won't refuse to confirm it in writing or some other way, if necessary. I have his address. But it would be best if you can keep him out of it."

Chokhov listened in silence. He was not at all surprised at what Ksenia told him. Knowing Vorobeitsev, he had no difficulty in believing that he was capable of such things. Nevertheless the news was a shock to him, perhaps because coming from a third person it presented Vorobeitsev to him in an entirely new light. From his own observations he himself had been aware of all this but none of it had struck him as sinister until now when he heard it described as "shady dealings," "black-marketeering," "misuse of official position." It was one thing to observe and to disapprove of someone's vices and another when these vices became common knowledge.

"Perhaps I had better talk to Vorobeitsev," he faltered after a brief silence.

Ksenia looked at him.

"You are too kind-hearted, Vasily Maximovich," she said with a gentle irony. "But if you ask me, you ought to talk to Lubentsov, not Vorobeitsev. At any rate I shall have to. I promised Gosha I would."

Chokhov did not reply. He went over to the motor-cycle and started the engine.

As soon as they returned to town Ksenia went up to Lubentsov's office. But he was out. Walking down the long corridor on the way to his own room, Chokhov paused for a moment outside the door of Vorobeitsev's office, went on, then came back and pushed open the door. Vorobeitsev was sitting at his desk, writing laboriously, his head bent so low that a lock of his fair hair touched the table and hid his face from view. He looked up when the door opened and shook back his hair with an accustomed gesture. His face lit up when he saw Chokhov.

"Sit down, Vasya," he said. "We don't see much of each other these days. We might be living in different towns."

"Yes," said Chokhov.

"I've missed you a lot," Vorobeitsev confessed and for a moment a hurt look came into his eyes.

"I want to talk to you," said Chokhov.

Vorobeitsev gave a quick, searching glance.

"Fire away," he said and began to clear away his papers, glancing furtively at Chokhov now and again. "You sound as solemn as an anniversary affair at the Bolshoi Theatre," he said. But in spite of his jocular tone he was uneasy. "Well, fire away," he repeated, still fussing with his papers. At last he got up, glanced at his watch and said, "That will do for today, I suppose. Now I can go and get something to eat. Have to be back here this evening anyhow. Another conference. The boss doesn't believe in wasting time."

Chokhov said nothing. He sat waiting until Vorobeitsev was ready and they went out of the building together.

What shall I say to him, Chokhov asked himself, feeling suddenly at a loss. He was not good at preaching to others.

"Where shall we go? To my place?" Vorobeitsev asked.

Chokhov nodded and they set out. Neither spoke for some time. At last Vorobeitsev, impatient as always, broke the silence:

"What are you so solemn about? What's the trouble? You look as if you were going to a funeral. Come on, out with it!"

The street was deserted and Chokhov could have had it out with Vorobeitsev then and there, but he did not know how to begin and so he waited until they reached Vorobeitsev's flat before speaking.

"You're in for trouble if you don't stop associating with those black-market crooks and going in for all sorts of shady deals," he burst out finally.

"What deals? What are you talking about?" cried Vorobeitsev, jumping up. "You mind what you're saying. I never thought you'd listen to all sorts of foul gossip. Who's been telling you stories?" As he fired these questions at Chokhov in an attempt to find out what had happened and how much was known about his actions, he racked his brain feverishly, wondering which of his cronies—especially the German—had given him away and what exactly the informer knew. It was not that he himself saw anything wrong in what he was doing, but now that he was threatened with exposure, he suddenly saw all his actions not through his own eyes or the eyes of his German associates, but through the eyes of Lubentsov and Kasatkin. He knew how bitterly they condemned such actions, and if they knew even half of the story they would unquestionably consider him a criminal, and perhaps even an enemy.

The main thing now was to find out from the simple-minded Chokhov just how much was known and from where the information had come. It would be too bad if one of the Germans had "squealed." But that was hardly likely since the Germans he knew regarded his modest

efforts to line his own pockets as something quite natural. They themselves had done the same all their lives. They might have done it out of revenge, but that too was improbable, since they were afraid of him and, in his opinion, they believed him to be powerful enough to do them serious harm. After all, he was useful to them, he gave some manufacturers more of the priority goods than they were entitled to, in exchange for something else. These operations, he had observed, seemed quite normal to them.

"It's all gossip," he said, pacing the room. "Don't you believe a word of it, Vasya. It's all that Kasatkin's doing. He doesn't trust anybody. He had me on the carpet once. Accused me of issuing more petrol to the distillery than I should have. I proved to him it was by mistake."

"Look here," Chokhov interrupted, "you needn't try to fool me. I know you and your philosophy."

"What of it? What do you know? Besides, you can't penalize a man for his philosophy. If you could, too many of us would be done for. Philosophy! Who asked you to stick your nose into my business anyway? I thought you were a friend of mine! I suppose you'll go sneaking off now and tell Lubentsov about my philosophy? I must say I never thought you'd be an informer. I thought you were a decent sort of chap, a good soldier, a comrade."

He waved his hands about, working himself up into a passion. The dog lying in the corner sat up and growled at Chokhov.

"So I haven't any friends then?" Vorobeitsev cried. "My only friend is that dog. You've forgotten me altogether lately, Vasya. You'd rather spend your time with that girl than with your old friend. Ah, Vasya, I never thought you'd let me down like this."

Chokhov had not expected such an outburst of feeling. Reticent himself, he was always disturbed by the spectacle of emotion in others.

"I'm warning you as a friend," he said, on the defensive. "Drop the whole rotten business, Vorobeitsev. See how well we all get along together here. If you've done anything you're sorry for, go straight to Lubentsov and make a clean breast of it. He'll understand. You know what a fine chap he is. You only pretend you don't like him."

Listening to Chokhov, Vorobeitsev felt sorrier for himself than ever. At the same time his mind was already busy with a plan of action depending on whether Lubentsov or Kasatkin should summon him. He was glad that Chokhov had warned him. He looked at him with gratitude, while at the same time considering the possibility of persuading him to act as a witness in his favour. If it came to the worst, he could admit that he had been light-minded; that he had not fully understood the danger of the capitalist environment and, what was most important, he must insist no one had ever bothered to talk to him, to explain things to him properly. He knew that this argument always had a powerful effect on Soviet people who believed so much in "educating" everybody.

The dog stopped growling and flopped down again on his mat, its big bulging eyes fixed in devotion on its master.

"Drop all those cronies of yours," said Chokhov, rising. "Cut them out right away."

"What cronies?" Vorobeitsev asked in a hurt voice. "You keep harping on my 'cronies.' "

"You oughtn't to visit those Germans."

"I don't visit anyone! You people don't know what you want: either you say there are all sorts of Germans, good and bad and most of them are good and we've got to help them, or else you say, keep away from them."

"You only have to keep away from the bad ones," said Chokhov.

"What about yourself? Didn't you go to Merker's? Who got you your motor-cycle? Merker!"

Chokhov shrugged his shoulders and walked out followed by a low growl from the dog. He stood for a moment or two outside the door, then went back to the office and wandered aimlessly about the rooms. Sergeant Veretennikov who was on duty told him that Lubentsov had not come back yet but had telephoned from Felsenstein to say that he had stopped at Lieutenant-Colonel Leonov's place and would be back in time for the conference.

Veretennikov was sorting out a large batch of correspondence. Chokhov sat down beside him, busy with his own thoughts.

"Why don't you get any letters, Comrade Captain?" the sergeant asked him.

"I have no one to write to me," said Chokhov.

"Three letters for the lieutenant-colonel today, Major Kasatkin has stopped getting letters now his wife's come. But Sergeant-Major Voronin gets the most. He gets letters from all parts of Russia, from relatives and from the chaps who served with him during the war. And there's some girl who keeps writing to him. I know them all by their handwriting by now."

"Does Captain Vorobeitsev get any letters?" Chokhov asked.

"Very few. In the beginning some girl from Zagorsk near Moscow used to write to him quite often. But she's stopped now. I suppose he never answered her."

Chokhov wanted to inquire about Ksenia but he thought better of it. He did not want to pry into her private affairs. He got up to go, but at that moment the door opened and Lubentsov came in. As usual he was not alone—Menshov was with him, and four Germans, three men and a woman. Without noticing Chokhov he hurried to his office, leaving the door ajar. Chokhov heard his rapid speech punctuated with occasional comments from

the Germans. Before long the Germans went away. As Chokhov got up to go in to Lubentsov, Veretennikov handed him the letters.

"You take them to him, Comrade Captain. He'll be very pleased. He's a great one for letters."

Chokhov laughed, took the envelopes and went into the office. Lubentsov reached out eagerly for the letters and sat down at once to read them. The next minute he jumped up in excitement.

"You may congratulate me," he said. "Tanya is coming. She has just been demobilized and now she's waiting for her papers."

He turned his face away, perhaps to hide the emotion he could not suppress at that moment. But when Menshov had gone out, he went over to Chokhov and gave him a warm hug.

"At last," he said, "humdrum family life begins. I am the happiest man on earth, Chokhov. But what do you know about domestic bliss? That's all in the future for you. Now, there was something urgent I had to attend to but for the life of me I can't remember what it was. News like this is bad for a man's work. Come on over to my place, Vasya, and we'll celebrate."

"What about the conference?"

"Ah yes. All right, we'll have our little celebration later on."

7

Lubentsov may have been right in saying that "good news is bad for one's work," but Chokhov, watching him closely as he conducted the conference, saw nothing in his behaviour to suggest that anything out of the ordinary had occurred. Everything proceeded as usual, except that once or twice Lubentsov caught Chokhov's eye and smiled.

All in all Chokhov came to the conclusion that good news is not necessarily detrimental to work.

But watching Vorobeitsev at the same time, he could not help noticing that bad news too did not appear to affect people greatly, at any rate not outwardly. Vorobeitsev listened to all that was said with studied attention, took voluminous notes of the proceedings, now and again murmured approval of something Lubentsov or Kasatkin said and in general looked more earnest and zealous than anyone else present.

This caused Chokhov to reflect that another man's mind was indeed a closed book; one never knew what another thought if he chose to wear a mask. But what was the use of such disguise, thought Chokhov, when elsewhere in the building there sat a stern-browed girl with relentless eyes who was bound to tell everything to Lubentsov today or tomorrow, and set in motion the slow but inexorable machinery of investigation that would plunge the whole house on the square into turmoil and lead to grave trouble for Vorobeitsev. He was sorry for Vorobeitsev, yet at the same time he could not help feeling proud of Ksenia, and these two conflicting emotions struggled within him.

The conference ended and the officers were about to disperse when Lubentsov stopped them.

"Comrades," he said. "There is another question of an entirely different nature that I would like to bring up here. It concerns your personal lives, a family matter, if you like. Comrade Kasatkin has been joined here recently by his wife and children. That is very good. Chegodayev is expecting his family to come here soon. I too am happy to announce that my wife is coming. But what about our bachelors? You are all grown-up men now. Isn't it time you were thinking of getting married? It would be an excellent thing if you were. Marriage is very important for men in our position here. Don't smile, comrades, I am quite serious. Of course, I have neither the right nor the

desire to force you to get married. I merely wish to say that if any of you have such intentions, don't hesitate to carry them into effect. Write to your sweethearts and invite them to join you. Well, that's all."

The conference over, the officers filed out talking and cracking jokes about the commandant's "marriage speech."

What had prompted Lubentsov to bring up the subject was the unfortunate case of an officer of Lieutenant-Colonel Leonov's staff, of which he had learned during his recent visit there.

The officer in question, Lieutenant Polivanov, a quiet, likable lad in command of the office platoon, had taken up with a German girl. Lubentsov had been the unwilling witness of the painful interview that took place between Leonov and Polivanov. The young man had been greatly distressed and embarrassed when he learned why he had been summoned. But he did not try to deny anything or make excuses. He raised his eyes to Leonov's and declared that he loved the girl and that she loved him.

Leonov took him to task. Could not the lieutenant understand that this was out of the question, that there could not be any intimacy between Soviet officers and German women? The lieutenant said no, he could not understand, and both Leonov and Lubentsov were nonplussed by the simple answer because essentially there could be no other answer. They themselves could not explain why a young Soviet man, wherever he happened to be serving, had no right to fall in love with a girl belonging to a different nationality than his own. Nevertheless, it was their duty to explain what they did not understand themselves.

Leonov, like Lubentsov, belonged to that school of thought among Soviet officers which held that whenever possible an order should be explained before being issued, except of course on the battlefield or in emergencies.

And so Leonov, with Lubentsov's help, tried to explain to Polivanov that Soviet servicemen in Germany were there on a government assignment doing a job of immense political importance, and could not permit anything to interfere with the performance of their duty, particularly in regard to their relations with the local population, which must be strictly formal.

"It is our duty," Leonov said, "to uphold the moral standards of our servicemen abroad and take the most stringent measures to combat any manifestation of laxity, weakness and forgetfulness of duty."

"But I love her," Polivanov insisted with the same disarming sincerity.

"I'm sorry, but you must make your choice," said Leonov. "Unless you break off all relations with this girl you will have to go home."

"She wants to go with me," said Polivanov. "Couldn't that be arranged?"

He was pale.

"No," said Leonov. "You must make your choice."

There was a brief silence.

"All right," said the lad at length. "I'll go home."

The long silence that followed was broken by Leonov.

"Sit down, my boy," he said. He and Lubentsov longed to say something kind and comforting to the lad, but they could think of nothing, and perhaps words were unnecessary for he could not help being aware of their sympathy. When after a long pause Leonov said, "Never mind, Polivanov, you're young, you have your whole life before you," the lieutenant said, "Thanks, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel."

He was thanking Leonov not for these banal words of consolation, but for the warm, human attitude of the two senior officers, and their sympathetic efforts to soften the blow.

This incident made Lubentsov think of his own officers, and he decided that the best remedy for such ailments was marriage.

When Chokhov went out to the reception-office with Lubentsov he noticed with some relief that Ksenia was not there. Evidently she had gone without waiting for the conference to end. Chokhov did not know that Voronin was waiting for Lubentsov at his home with information he had obtained by doing some private investigating of his own after Kranz's warning.

He had even been to Merker's place, gaining an entry on some trifling pretext, and with his uncanny gift of observation he had noticed that there was someone in the next room who had been hastily concealed there on the unexpected appearance of the Russian soldier. A large, dirty-white three-quarter coat with a fur collar hung on the rack beside Merker's small-sized overcoat.

Voronin's attention was struck by the abundance of beautiful and obviously expensive knick-knacks scattered all over the place. Acting as he assumed Vorobeitsev did in these surroundings, Voronin proceeded loudly to admire the various objects. And each time he did so Merker would say:

"You can buy it if you wish, Herr Feldwebel. Quite cheap."

Merker's wife too appeared to be one of the objects offered for sale. Dressed in a seductive gown, she hovered around Voronin, smiling coyly at him.

A dozen or so tins of American pork and beans stood on the table alongside several packs of Lucky Strikes. A huge slab of butter floated in a bucket of water in a corner of the room.

Voronin went straight home and waited impatiently for Lubentsov's return. At last the commandant arrived, but not alone. With him were Chokhov, Menshov and Vorobeitsev. The latter had accompanied the others all the

way from the commandant's office and Lubentsov had no other alternative but to invite him in.

When they were seated around the table Lubentsov announced that he had had a special reason for inviting them today. This was a happy occasion for him, he said, and if they had no objection he would like to celebrate.

But they had drunk no more than one glass of wine when the phone rang.

"They won't give you any peace, chief," said Vorobeitsev assuming an expression of mingled annoyance and admiration.

Lubentsov picked up the receiver. It was Sebastian. He wanted to see the commandant at once on an urgent matter.

"I shall be over right away," said Lubentsov.

He excused himself to his guests and went up to the professor's house.

Sebastian was waiting for him at the door. They went upstairs and crossed the sitting-room into the professor's study. Lubentsov, who had never been in this room before, was rather surprised to see books and manuscripts scattered around with anything but German neatness.

"You have not been to see us for a long time," said Sebastian. He picked up a sheet of paper with a brief typewritten text on it, twirled it in his fingers and laid it down again. Then looking straight at Lubentsov he said, "Are you satisfied with me? With my work, I mean?"

"Perfectly," replied Lubentsov in some surprise. "Thanks to you the agricultural situation in our district is much better than in many others. You enjoy tremendous prestige among the population. You are very popular. And you deserve to be. It is my private opinion that you are in many respects a born statesman. Perhaps you sometimes lack firmness.... Or rather, you can be firm, but ... how shall I put it, you philosophize a little too much."

Sebastian laughed a little awkwardly.

"Thanks for your kind words," he said. "You are right about my tendency to philosophize. The trouble, I would say, is not so much that I like to think, but that I think too slowly, more slowly than circumstances permit. I am like Buridan's ass who died of starvation between two heaps of hay because he could not make up his mind which to eat."

"But you have made your choice," laughed Lubentsov.

"Thanks to you," said Sebastian. "You forced me to eat from one of the heaps."

"Forced you?" Lubentsov smiled.

"Persuaded me, then."

They both laughed this time.

"I have a favour to ask of you," Sebastian went on, twirling his spectacles. "Don't you think I have done enough? After all, I have been neglecting my scientific work. I must finish my book. And now Halle University is inviting me to deliver a course of lectures there."

"What! Are you leaving Lauterburg?" cried Lubentsov.

"No," said Sebastian much flattered by Lubentsov's reaction. "No, I shall be going to Halle only once or twice a week. I am prepared to continue working for the Lauterburg Council but in an unofficial capacity."

Lubentsov considered for a moment before replying.

"You are right," he said at last. "I shall take it up with my chiefs. I personally have no objections."

"I knew it!" exclaimed the delighted Sebastian. "Erika was wrong. She said you would never agree to release me from the post of Landrat."

"She credits me with even less brains than I have," laughed Lubentsov. "But whom do you suggest as your successor? Have you anyone in mind?"

"I would nominate Herr Langheinrich. He knows his agriculture well and he is an ardent supporter of land reform. Besides, he doesn't think as slowly as I do...."

"But do you think he will agree to exchange farming for an office job?"

"Oh, I am sure that if anyone can persuade him you can."

"Well, he is a good candidate. All right. Suppose you talk to him. He has a great respect for you."

"Very well, I'll talk to him," agreed Sebastian with a satisfied laugh. "You do know how to handle us. It often surprises me to find how well you understand the psychology of the German. You know his strong and weak points and how to take advantage of them!"

Lubentsov frowned.

"Take advantage?" he said. "Doesn't that make me look like a petty intriguer? My dear Professor, we are not merely 'playing ball' with the Germans as some of you think. The question is both simpler and more complicated than that. When we do what we can to better your lives, to bring about the re-unification of Germany, and so on, we are not trying to 'flirt' with you, we are pursuing a definite policy, a policy based on a definite outlook. I know very well that some of you believe that you Germans are cleverly making use of our differences with our allies to wring compromises from us. You are mistaken. We are pursuing our own policy. That policy is not dictated by any temporary tactical considerations. It springs from our belief that the land and everything else should belong to those who work. That is all. The Americans too are not flirting with you merely to annoy us Russians. They are also pursuing a policy founded on a definite outlook. Roughly speaking they support the capitalists and landlords and suppress the workers and peasants. Their policy is to give all the freedom to the former and none to the latter. It does not matter what words they use to screen their policy and how convincing those words might sound. It is the policy that is important. We are capable of committing, and indeed have

committed, many stupid blunders. But our line of policy is correct and it is the only progressive one. The Allies at best can bring you back to the pre-Hitler *status quo*, or rather that is what they would like to do. We are trying to lead you forward."

"Any line," said Sebastian, "even the correct line, can be applied poorly or well. You do it well."

"Splendid!" cried Lubentsov. "I am very glad we approve of one another."

He got up to go. Sebastian rose too. For a moment he stood motionless, then in a slightly different tone, he said:

"I have another matter to put to you. I should like to make a trip to the West, to Frankfort on the Main, to be exact. My son has invited me to pay him a visit."

"Has he?" Lubentsov said and sat down again. "Will you be gone long?" he asked slowly searching Sebastian's face.

"About a week," Sebastian replied quickly.

"Well, I think it can be arranged. I shall see about obtaining permission for you at once."

"Thank you. I thought you would."

"Why?" laughed Lubentsov, "did Fräulein Erika doubt that as well?"

"N-no." Sebastian looked flustered. "It was I who doubted it."

"You were mistaken."

"I appreciate this very much," said Sebastian and, going close to Lubentsov, he said significantly, "Erika will stay here. I shall go alone."

"A hostage, eh?" said Lubentsov with a shade of reproach in his voice, yet secretly glad to hear it.

"Exactly, Herr Lubentsov," Sebastian said. "I do not want you to have any doubts in the matter. After Professor Wildapfel, our leading agronomist, left and failed to return you have every right to distrust us."

"I daresay you are right," Lubentsov assented. "The head of SMAG was terribly upset about that business. He believes that Wildapfel will live to regret his action. A man who is guilty of a breach of faith can never be happy. His action will haunt him all his life and in the end he will repent, but by then it will be too late. I have deep faith in you. In the first place you are a clever man. In my opinion the trouble with Wildapfel was that he was not clever. A man may be a scientist without necessarily being clever, don't you think so?"

"That's true, unfortunately. There are quite as many learned fools as ignorant ones. But you are wrong about Wildapfel. He is a very clever man, but he is mercenary besides. He was doubtless won over by promises of lavish rewards."

8

The knob of the glass door clicked, the door opened and Erika came into the room. Behind her were several other young people who drew back when they saw the commandant and the Landrat.

Lubentsov for the first time in many weeks found himself able to meet Erika's eyes. He gazed at her steadily, his eyes frankly expressing the admiration she had always aroused in him.

To tell the truth, as he stood looking at her and listening to her voice, he felt proud of himself for his self-possession. And if his pride was tinged with faint regret, that regret was eclipsed by the satisfaction of knowing that he had remained master of his emotions.

"You haven't been to our seminar yet," she said to him with reproach. "You have time for everything but us."

"I shall come, I promise faithfully," he said. "I simply haven't had the time. But I know all about your work and

I am delighted to hear that you are making such progress. We need teachers badly."

"We have so many wonderful people here," she said, her eyes shining. "I never thought one could find so many really splendid people in a place like Lauterburg. The seminar was worth organizing if only to find that out." She paused for a moment. "I wish I could stay for a while, but I can't. They're waiting for me." She said good-bye quickly and hurried out.

"I must be going too," said Lubentsov.

Sebastian saw him to the door.

It was quite dark outside. A heavy starless sky hung over the town. Lubentsov made his way slowly down the drive, his eyes gradually accustoming themselves to the darkness.

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel." Voronin's voice coming suddenly out of the gloom beside him, as it had on so many other dark nights at the front, reminded him of the war.

The ex-scout quickly told him about Kranz's warning and about his own visit to Merker's flat.

"It's a hide-out," he said. "A real racket. What's more, Kranz tells me Merker used to be a nazi."

Lubentsov was greatly disturbed by the news. He and Voronin stood for a while without speaking, then went inside.

With a quick glance at Vorobeitsev, Lubentsov resumed his place at the table, excused himself for his prolonged absence and raised his wine-glass. Everyone drank and the glasses were refilled.

"Let's drink to Tatyana Vladimirovna," said Voronin. Lubentsov sighed.

"Very well," he said. "She is on her way here now most likely. And now," he said when the toast had been drunk "suppose you tell me, comrades, how you have been spending your spare time lately? What do you do with

yourselves? What have you been reading, if anything? Suppose you begin, Vorobeitsev."

Vorobeitsev threw a swift look at Chokhov.

"I haven't been doing anything in particular, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel. I read a bit, study German, and all that. But it's dull, of course. I daresay the officers in the bigger cities, like Halle or Weimar, have a gayer time than we. There are the Red Army Houses, with all sorts of visiting artists."

"Yes," said Lubentsov, frowning in spite of himself. "I suppose it is gayer there." He sat fingering the stem of his wine-glass absently. "But you haven't been very explicit," he went on after a pause. "What did you do yesterday after work, for instance?"

"Yesterday? I don't remember exactly," said Vorobeitsev, with another quick look at Chokhov who sat with his brows knit and his mouth compressed. "Stayed at home, I guess. That's right. I spent the evening at home. My dog is sick."

"Is that the one you went shooting hares with?" Lubentsov inquired without a smile.

"No. A different one. That one was a hunting dog. It wasn't mine. I have a boxer."

An awkward silence ensued. Menshov, who had no suspicion of what was going on, filled in the gap by describing how he spent his leisure time. He had been to a variety show once or twice. He had rather enjoyed it. Not very profound, of course, but quite amusing. He had been doing quite a bit of reading too of late. As a matter of fact, he had discovered that reading was not only a necessity but a pleasure. Among other things he had read a good many Soviet books about the war. He liked them because they reminded him so vividly of his own wartime experiences. He had tried to do some reading in German, and had managed a few detective stories, but found the more serious reading too difficult as yet.

He told all this in great detail, confident that Lubentsov must be interested once he had inquired.

"And now we are thinking of putting on a play," he went on. "We haven't chosen the play as yet. Something by Ostrovsky perhaps. Some of our soldiers have quite a gift for the stage. And now we have some actresses too. It turns out that Kasatkin's wife has done a lot of amateur acting in her time. Too bad she isn't a little younger. We offered Ksenia a role but she turned us down flat."

"Here is the young lady herself," said Voronin, opening the door.

Ksenia stood on the threshold.

"Come and join us," invited Lubentsov getting up and going to meet her. He brought her over to the table and found a place for her. In an instant a clean plate and a glass of wine appeared before her. But she did not touch anything.

"I have come to see you on business," she said.

"What is it? Anything happened?"

"No. But I would like to talk to you in private."

Lubentsov gave her a searching look and for some reason he remembered Kranz's warning and the unpleasant conversation he had just had with Vorobeitsev. Vorobeitsev too felt vaguely alarmed; it may have been because of some unconscious movement on the part of Chokhov who looked gloomy and apprehensive.

The tension, awkwardness and uneasiness felt by five of the six persons present would have been unendurable had it not been for Menshov, who, having had a few drinks, was in a pleasantly mellow mood; he laughed, cracked jokes, and told some amusing stories. He told Lubentsov that he had decided to take his advice and write to a girl he knew back home, an old school friend of his. He would write the very next day, in fact.

"She would make a wonderful Larissa in *The Dowerless Bride*," he exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"You wanted to speak to me," Lubentsov said to Ksenia and they withdrew to the adjoining room.

"How about another drink," proposed Vorobeitsev, and clinking with Menshov, he drank. Then he got up, walked across the room and paused at the far end to light a cigarette.

Lubentsov and Ksenia rejoined the company some five minutes later.

"Why does everyone look so glum?" Lubentsov demanded jocularly. "Anyone would think you weren't glad your chief was going to be a family man again." He refilled all the glasses. Vorobeitsev came over to the table.

"Permit me to propose a toast," he said. "I should like to drink to friendship. Let us respect one another and stand by one another through thick and thin. As we did at the front. Stick together and stand up for one another. I, for one, would like to go home as soon as possible. I want to return to the country we all fought for in the Great Patriotic War. I want to drink to all who fought in that war. I want to drink to...."

"That's too much for one glass of wine," said Lubentsov. "Let's take your first toast, friendship. That's a good toast, although you were a bit vague about it. I quite agree that we must respect one another, but to stand up for one another.... Against whom? All right, we shan't go into that. Let us drink to friendship." He clinked glasses all around but kept his eyes averted.

"I must be going," said Chokhov.

"Yes, it is getting late," said Vorobeitsev hastily, and began nervously to search for his cap. But Chokhov, wishing to avoid his company, turned to Menshov.

"Coming, Menshov?"

"Of course."

Ksenia got up and joined them. Lubentsov made no effort to detain his guests tonight. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts.

At last everyone was gone except Voronin, who sat opposite him with a dark scowl on his face.

"What an evening," he remarked. "That Vorobeitsev is a downright scoundrel. You can take it from me. I had my eye on him all the time tonight. It made me sick to see the way he kept trying to get into your good books."

"You're very hasty in your judgement of people, Comrade Sergeant-Major," said Lubentsov severely. "We are often too ready to condemn a person on the flimsiest evidence. It's enough for someone to say something, or some rumour to be spread for a person to become suspect. Rumours ought to be verified first." He thought for a moment. "Ksenia also told me of Vorobeitsev's connections with that black marketeer."

"There, you see," said Voronin. "Where are you going?" he asked. Lubentsov was putting on his overcoat.

"For a walk. My head aches."

"I'll go with you."

"What for? I'll be back soon."

"No. I'm coming along."

They went outside together and walked slowly down the street. It was a damp, chilly night.

"Wonderful weather for a stroll," snorted Voronin.

"You can go home if you like. I'm going to call on Kasatkin."

"I'll go with you."

"I ought to have called him up first," Lubentsov murmured. "What's the time?"

"About twelve. Better put it off till tomorrow."

Lubentsov walked on without replying. Finally they reached Kasatkin's house. Lubentsov stood by the door for a few minutes, hesitating, then swiftly rang the bell. They heard footsteps in the hallway, the door opened and Ka-

satkin, looking very domestic in a Ukrainian shirt, civilian trousers and fur-lined bedroom slippers, appeared. Behind him was his wife Anastasia Stepanovna, a tall. buxom woman with a somewhat pale flabby face. Two little Kasatkins, aged about eight and ten, both amusing smaller editions of their father, with the same mop of bristly hair and exactly the same features, peeped from behind the ample folds of her bright dressing gown. In spite of the lateness of the hour they did not look at all sleepy.

"Back to bed at once, you little monkeys!" Anastasia Stepanovna scolded them, looking stern, but turned instantly to Lubentsov with a beaming smile that revealed two rows of the whitest of little teeth and charming dimples on her cheeks. But Kasatkin glanced at her in reproval, for Lubentsov's face and the lateness of his visit told him that something was amiss. With an anxious glance at the two men, Anastasia Stepanovna hastily withdrew, taking the children with her.

"I'll wait for you here," said Voronin to Lubentsov, seating himself in the hallway and lighting a cigarette.

Left alone with Kasatkin, Lubentsov told him all he had learned from Voronin and Ksenia. Kasatkin, like Voronin, said at once that he had disliked Vorobeitsev from the first, to which Lubentsov, reminding him of the saying about the Russian muzhik being wise after the event, declared that the important thing now was to investigate the matter thoroughly. This job he assigned to Kasatkin and insisted that for the time being the investigation should be conducted in secret.

"Just the same," Kasatkin said, "I maintain that we have been altogether too lenient with Vorobeitsev. And with Chokhov too for that matter. They have been guilty of several breaches of discipline. Take that hunting trip of theirs. Since then Vorobeitsev has been late for work many times, he shows too little interest in his work, and

his attendance of the Party history class has been poor. . . ."

"All that has no bearing on the case," cried Lubentsov with some annoyance. "Chegodayev doesn't attend Party history class any too regularly either. What connection is there between that and black-marketeering! It's absurd!" He paused for a moment and went on in a calmer tone, "I hope that all these reports are greatly exaggerated. I have no particular liking for Vorobeitsev either, and I quite understand how you feel about him. But personal likes and dislikes can only lead one astray in such cases." He paused again. "How does Anastasia Stepanovna like it here? She isn't sorry she came, I hope? It is always hard to get used to a strange country at first."

"She'll get used to it all right," said Kasatkin. "About that Merker, I'll get in touch with the police."

They went out into the hall. Voronin rose and took his coat off the hook and for a few minutes the three men stood together in silence.

"A nasty business," Lubentsov said at length and, shaking his head, walked to the door.

9

When Lubentsov had gone Kasatkin summoned Ksenia and Jost. The police chief was in bed when the call came, but he dressed at once and hurried over; by now the Germans were accustomed to the commandant's office working all hours of the day and night and were no longer alarmed by these nocturnal summonses.

Kasatkin questioned him about Merker and ordered his flat placed under observation, cautioning Jost to choose his most reliable men for the job. The police must know everything that went on there. All visitors to his flat, no matter who they were and what position they

occupied, whether in the Town Council or elsewhere, must be closely watched. The police were to report every two hours, not by telephone but in person.

Having delivered these instructions, Kasatkin dismissed Jost. Sleep, however, was out of the question; he was too much upset by the whole business. Ksenia, too, made no move to leave, although Kasatkin's wife looked into the room several times with a wordless appeal to her husband.

"You can make me a bed on the couch here," Ksenia finally suggested.

"That's right," said Kasatkin in approval. "Sleep here and when Jost comes I'll wake you."

Jost turned up at three o'clock. He had nothing of interest to report apart from the fact that the lights were still on in Merker's flat; they could be seen shining through chinks in the heavy curtains.

At five o'clock Jost had again no news except that the lights had been switched off half an hour previously. The police agents were watching from a flat in the house opposite belonging to a railway worker who was away on night duty. Both the front and back entrances of Merker's house were under observation.

Throughout the following day Jost came to the commandant's office every two hours, and by the end of the day Kasatkin had a long list of the people who had visited Merker's flat. They were chiefly local merchants, among them Frau Lüttwitz, owner of the local distillery, a fur merchant named Rabe and a former landowner named Arensberg in whom the police had been interested for some time but who had latterly disappeared. Arensberg had been to see Merker twice that day.

At three in the afternoon Kasatkin and Jost went to Lubentsov to report on what had been done. Lubentsov was not satisfied since it was not known what went on inside the flat. Jost said he would see what could be done.

The next day he sent a man in to repair Merker's telephone which had been purposely put out of commission. Later on another man penetrated into the flat in the guise of a plumber.

But nothing of importance happened until half past ten at night when a man with a ruddy complexion, wearing a light three-quarter coat with a fur collar came out of Merker's flat. Jost was informed at once. From the description he knew the man could be none other than the "Werwolf General" for whom the police and the Soviet counter-intelligence had been searching for a long time. Unfortunately, the police agent trailing him lost sight of him at a busy street crossing, for which he was severely reprimanded by the deputy commandant Major Kasatkin himself and later by Jost.

Lubentsov happened to be out of town that day. He had been summoned to Altstadt by General Kuprianov. While there, he took the opportunity to ask for permission for Sebastian to visit the Western zone. Kuprianov would not hear of it at first. After the Wildapfel affair he distrusted all professors. Lubentsov, however, pleaded his cause with much fervour. He pointed out that honest men ought not to be made to pay for the sins of the dishonest. He told Kuprianov of his talk with Sebastian and mentioned that the professor's daughter would be remaining behind. Finally Kuprianov gave his consent. Lubentsov asked him to call up the professor and tell him personally that he had no objections to his resigning from the post of Landrat or to his paying a visit to his son. The interpreter who transmitted the message to Sebastian added on Kuprianov's behalf that the University would be impatiently awaiting the professor's return, reminding him that the course of lectures he was preparing would be delivered to the new student body consisting of young Germans from all democratic sections of society.

The warmth with which Sebastian thanked the general through the interpreter left no doubt as to his sincerity, and Kuprianov was reassured. Nevertheless, he grumbled good-naturedly to Lubentsov, "You'll get me court-martialled yet, young man."

On returning to Lauterburg and hearing the latest news from Kasatkin about the Merker case, Lubentsov drove straight to the police department with his assistant.

"That man ought to have been arrested on the spot," he told the officials there. "You have made a serious blunder, gentlemen. And in general it is hard to understand how that man can hide in this town. If the police worked properly that could never happen. Why don't you enlist the support of the public? If you think the police can function without it you are mistaken. What about searching Merker's place? A surprise search, of course, before he has time to discover that he is being observed."

Hardly had Lubentsov and Kasatkin returned to the commandant's office when Jost turned up and reported with an apologetic air that just as they had been about to search Merker's flat an officer of the commandant's staff, Captain Vorobeitsev, had arrived there by car and entered the house. He had stayed there for an hour and had emerged carrying a suitcase, which he stowed sway in his car—a new Nash sports model he had registered the other day at the police department—and driven off. Incidentally, the registration had been illegal, since Soviet Army men were required to register their cars with the Soviet Administration and not the German police.

"You ought to have made the search in any case," said Lubentsov wearily.

"What shall we do with Merker?" Jost inquired. "Arrest him?"

"Yes," said Kasatkin.

"But suppose our man comes back to his flat?" Jost ventured.

"All right, we'll wait a few more hours. Until 11 o'clock. I'll send you a few soldiers. Voronin will be with them."

At 11 o'clock the search was carried out and Merker, his wife and a young woman who happened to be on the premises were arrested. Several thousand American dollars were found, along with a large quantity of valuables, food products and various other goods, three blank American passes to the Western zone, and a plan of Lauterburg with crosses marking the Soviet guard posts. On the back of the plan was a list of places where Soviet garrisons were located marked "possibly regimental H.Q.," "possibly regiment," "possibly divisional H.Q.," "artillery unit," etc. Among the papers was found a snapshot of Lubentsov with a brief description of him scribbled on the back.

Several of Merker's visitors, including the landowner Arensberg, were detained at the same time, elsewhere in the city.

The papers found in Merker's flat were taken to the commandant's office. Lubentsov, Yavorsky and Ksenia sat down at once to examine them, giving instructions that they were not to be disturbed. Engrossed though he was in the documents, Lubentsov nevertheless heard Kasatkin order the officer on duty in the outer office to send up two soldiers and the commander of the platoon.

"What's that for?" Lubentsov asked him.

Kasatkin turned swiftly, closed the door quietly and came over to the table.

"To arrest Vorobeitsev," he said.

"I don't think we should do that just yet," said Lubentsov, rising from his chair. "No, no, Ivan Mitrofanovich. Let us not do anything hasty. Let us call him in, talk to him, find out more about the whole business. Vorobeitsev simply made use of that scoundrel to obtain things like an automobile, or a camera. But I'm sure he did not really know what sort of a person he was dealing with.

Surely you don't consider Vorobeitsev an enemy? Or do you?"

"I think he ought to be arrested," said Kasatkin.

"We must look into the matter first," Lubentsov objected. "Yavorsky, please tell the officer on duty to get Vorobeitsev over here."

Yavorsky went out and came back in a few moments.

For a while no one spoke. The rustling of the papers was the only sound in the room.

It was Kasatkin who broke the heavy silence.

"I have been in the Party for many years," he said in an unnaturally high-pitched voice. "I was a member when you probably were still a Young Pioneer. You have no right to ignore my opinion. You are too presumptuous. You have no respect for anyone's opinion but your own."

The blood rushed to Lubentsov's face, then drained away leaving him quite pale. But all he said was:

"Don't you think it is better to speak of such things in private?"

"Yes, yes," muttered Kasatkin and went over to the window.

Ksenia got up and went out of the room. Yavorsky, perspiring and red in the face, also rose and was about to go when Lubentsov stopped him.

"Very well, you may speak now," said Lubentsov. "I am ready to hear what you have to say. And I shall regard this talk purely as an exchange of opinions between two Party members. So you are free to say whatever you please. It's better to speak your mind than to nurse a grievance. After all, this is the first time I have heard any such accusation from you. I foolishly believed there was perfect harmony between us."

The officer on duty appeared at the door.

"The platoon commander and his men are here at your orders," he announced, clicking his heels.

"I countermand the order," Lubentsov replied. "Dismiss them. Get Vorobeitsev."

The officer withdrew.

"You must heed the opinions of your comrades," Kasatkin said without heat. "You must not think that you know everything, that you do not need advice from others. . . ."

Lubentsov listened, shaking his head. He felt more surprised than angry. He had sincerely believed all this time that he had sought Kasatkin's advice in everything, that he rarely took any action without the knowledge of his assistant, and that their relations, both official and personal, were almost ideal. Rarely and only in exceptional cases had he ever treated Kasatkin as a subordinate; on the contrary, he had always tried to stress that after all it was only a matter of chance that he and not Kasatkin was in charge. But now he began to think that perhaps Kasatkin was right; perhaps he, Lubentsov, had not done all that he could to create a proper comradely atmosphere in the office. It would have been easy enough to conclude that Kasatkin, feeling there was no firm hand over him, had "forgotten himself," "grown swell-headed" or some other such excuse. But it was not in Lubentsov's nature to absolve himself of all blame.

"If you are right," he said with disarming simplicity, "then I am in the wrong. I shall think it over. At any rate, let me assure you that I appreciate your work very much and have always had the greatest respect for your opinions. But you can't expect me to agree with you in everything."

When Kasatkin had gone, Ksenia, who had been waiting in the outer office, came back into the room. It was already quite late.

"Have they called Vorobeitsev?" Lubentsov asked her.

"They can't find him anywhere," she replied, adding

with a caustic smile, "You won't find him around at this time of night."

Early the next morning several counter-intelligence officers arrived from Altstadt. They spent the rest of the day with Kasatkin interrogating the Germans who had been arrested.

That evening, as they were assembled in Lubentsov's office to take stock of the day's findings, the door burst open and General Kuprianov appeared on the threshold. He strode into the room, took off his cap, placed it on the table and sat down.

"Where's Vorobeitsev?" he asked.

"Vorobeitsev?" Lubentsov repeated wonderingly. "I'll send for him at once." And he got up to instruct the officer on duty to summon Vorobeitsev.

"Don't trouble yourself," said the general. He sat slumped in his chair, looking years older. "Don't trouble yourself," he repeated. "Your Vorobeitsev has gone. He cleared out yesterday. He is a traitor to his country. At four o'clock this afternoon he spoke over the Frankfort radio. Here is his statement," and the general flung a crumpled sheet of paper on the desk.

10

At that moment Lubentsov became sharply aware of a host of those small details which usually skim the surface of the consciousness: the fine wrinkles on the knuckles of General Kuprianov's large hands; the swaying shadow of the light fixtures shaken by the general's heavy tread; the dangling of the brass tag attached by a string to the key that protruded from the lock of the heavy, dark-brown door. This sudden focussing of his attention on minor details kept his mind off the terrible thing that had happened, staved off the dread moment when it would have to be faced. It was as if his life's blood, in-

stead of gushing from his heart in one deadly stream, was being squeezed out drop by drop. At that moment he thought least of all of Vorobeitsev as someone he had known, who had lived alongside him. Nor did any thought of himself, of his own part in all this or of the consequences enter his head. He thought with cold detachment of all that had taken place, seeing it as something abominable, unnatural and revolting that had come suddenly into his life to poison it perhaps for ever. His first reaction was one of incredulity—the thing was too monstrous to be believed. He could not believe that this man, whoever he might be, was a traitor, just as we cannot believe in the death of those we love. The thing was frightening because it was unnatural, preposterous, impossible. At first the sense of unreality was so powerful that for a moment he fully expected the door to open and the culprit himself to enter and prove that it was all nonsense. That would be the natural thing to happen. For an instant he had the insane notion that if he were to close his eyes and go through all the rooms of the house, groping his way like a blind man, he would be sure to bump into the one who had fled. It seemed fantastic that the man should be gone while his personal file with his photograph and questionnaire lay quietly in the safe among all the other personnel folders and questionnaires.

Being by nature a man of action primarily, Lubentsov felt impelled to do something, to act, and the realization that there was nothing to be done, that no action could be taken, horrified him.

In the meantime he saw and heard everything about him with astonishing clarity. He heard the words spoken by the others and he heard his own words—for he too spoke and in a comparatively calm voice. His ear caught not only what was said but what was left unsaid, and he even knew what would be said before the words were actually uttered.

Something had to be done, if only for the sake of appearances. Lubentsov got into the car with Kasatkin and the intelligence officers and drove out to the house where Vorobeitsev had lived. They found the door of his flat locked, and not wishing to go to the landlord for the keys, they succeeded by joint efforts in forcing their way in.

A heavy, sourish odour, as foul as the thing that had happened, met them as they entered. It occurred to Lubentsov that the man who lived here could not have breathed any other air. That man had gone among his fellows, feeling as uncomfortable in the air they breathed as a fish out of water, and had no doubt hurried back whenever he could to this dark, evil-smelling room where alone he could breathe freely.

The reason for the foul odour was that Vorobeitsev had locked his dog inside. Now the massive, drooling boxer, delighted to be released from captivity, wagged his stump of a tail in welcome. While the place was being searched, Lubentsov stared at the bulging eyes of the dog as if he wished to read in them the truth about the man who had lived here. He found himself wishing fervently that the dog could speak and tell them how it had all happened.

A chill numbness gradually took possession of Lubentsov. It was as if paralysis had seized his limbs. He stood leaning against the wall staring at the men opening and shutting drawers, looking into cupboards, rummaging through heaps of scent bottles, leather-bound note-pads, and rags of all kinds. He looked at all this with indifference, dimly surprised at this abundance of needless rubbish that had evidently been accumulated with painstaking care and something of the collector's passion.

The search ended. One by one the officers retired to the bathroom to wash their hands. Then they came back, sat down and lit cigarettes. Lubentsov alone remained standing; he could not endure the thought of sitting on a chair which that man might have occupied only the day before.

"Find anything?" he asked.

"Nothing much," answered one of the officers. "He certainly collected a lot of clothing. Men's, women's, anything."

"Ran off and left everything behind," remarked another. "Must have taken valuables only."

"A heavy drinker too," observed someone else. The entire flat was strewn with empty bottles. There must have been a good hundred of them, of different shapes and sizes and with different labels. Indecent knick-knacks and pornographic postcards lay about.

Rousing himself with an effort, Lubentsov went out, got into the car and drove back to the commandant's office. The night was pitch-dark without a glimmer of light anywhere. The town slept soundly. Lubentsov, his mind dwelling on the catastrophe, suddenly felt bitterly ashamed before this town and its inhabitants for what had happened in the House on the Square. He groaned aloud as if in pain.

Somehow he managed to report to Kuprianov on the results of the search. The general was still sitting motionless in Lubentsov's office in the same attitude as when they had left him. He heard out the report, then got up and, with a curt good-bye, left.

At last Lubentsov was alone. Only now as he sat in solitude in his office was the full weight of his disgrace borne in upon him. Never in his life had he felt so wretched.

After sitting thus for about half an hour he roused himself, summoned the officer on duty and asked him to bring him the personal files of all the staff members of the commandant's office. While waiting for the folders to be brought in he was suddenly seized with the desire to visit the soldiers' quarters. Moved by an irresistible impulse, he went downstairs and soon found himself in the big room which served the men for a club. It was empty, of

course. He switched on the light. Everything was in perfect order. Russian books, pamphlets and bound copies of army regulations stood on the shelves of the bookcases. A fresh issue of the wall newspaper hung on the wall. Beside it was the bulletin board and diagrams showing the parts of infantry weapons. There were several large portraits of leaders and smaller portraits of Russian writers. The sight of this small but well-ordered Red Army club merely added to the confusion of Lubentsov's mind, because of the staggering contrast between this atmosphere of clean, decent living and what had occurred that day.

He heard voices in the next room and paused at the entrance to the sentry room which was flooded with light. Several soldiers were sitting there waiting to go on duty. They were conversing in low voices. One of them told his comrades about a letter he had received the day before from Velikiye Luki where he came from. Another cursed the managers of his collective farm in Dniepropetrovsk Region for not having brought in the potato crop in time, while a third observed that now that so many soldiers were being demobilized things back home would be easier.

Then Sergeant Veretennikov joined in the conversation to describe the journey he and five other soldiers had made from Byelorussia to the Harz. He told the story so vividly that his listeners seemed to see the winding country roads and to smell the scent of the pines under the warm sun.

"Only once we broke regulations," he said. "That was in Poland. We were supposed to catch up with our unit as soon as possible, but we stopped over in a village on the way. Spent a few days there building a house. We didn't feel we were soldiers any more and did what we liked."

Lubentsov moved away from the door and went upstairs. He wandered aimlessly about the empty rooms for a while and then returned to his office. A heap of folders lay waiting for him on his desk. He went through them,

looking for one particular folder. It seemed to him that it could not possibly be here once the man it represented had gone.

But the folder was there, looking exactly like all the other folders in the pile.

Lubentsov studied Vorobeitsev's file for a long time. As he read over the questionnaire he was amazed to find how little all this personal data, couched in formal questions and answers, revealed. It merely registered the barest externals of a man's life, leaving the rest—indeed all that really mattered—blank. Moreover, the very existence of the personal file lulled one's vigilance, allayed all doubts, inasmuch as it suggested that the person it described did not walk the earth at all but stood quietly and decorously in the shape of a cardboard folder in some safe along with innumerable other such folders.

Lubentsov tried to recall his first meeting with Vorobeitsev and his subsequent impressions of the man. No, there was no doubt about it, Vorobeitsev had made an unfavourable impression on him from the start. But Lubentsov had never tried to verify that first impression or to get to know the man better. He had believed in that personal file as old people believe in God.

The file contained half a dozen testimonials signed by various officers under whom Vorobeitsev had served. Lubentsov reddened with anger when he read the empty, meaningless phrases. "Energetic, zealous. Competent," one testimonial read. "Not without shortcomings in his personal life," another declared significantly, "but well fitted for the position he holds." "Morally stable," concluded another.

And, lastly, the testimonial signed by Lubentsov himself. It was as meaningless a piece of writing as the others. True, there were a few words about Vorobeitsev's individualistic tendencies, his rudeness and arrogance. But then came formal and irresponsible statements to

the effect that he was loyal to the common cause and well fitted for the position he held.

Lubentsov rang for the officer on duty and ordered him to return the files to the personnel department. Left alone again, he stared out of the window. The darkness was as impenetrable as before. Then his eye fell on the conference table adjoining his desk. Next to the empty water carafe lay a crumpled sheet of paper. Without taking his eyes from that paper, he got up, went over to it, picked it up, smoothed it out and began to read.

It was couched in flowery language, and although barely one day had passed since its author had left the Russian army, there was something odd about the wording as if it had been translated from a foreign language. The document emitted the same foul and nauseating odour as Vorobeitsev's flat—the odour of treachery. Vorobeitsev asked for political asylum on the grounds that being in political disagreement with the Communist Party and the Soviet Government he had been forced to flee from the Soviet zone. This would have been merely ridiculous had the motive he gave for his flight not contained so much vicious nonsense. He declared that he had run away because there was no freedom in the Soviet Union. Among other things he said that the higher schools in the U.S.S.R. enrolled only Communist Party and Komsomol members; that workers received only fifty per cent of their earnings, the remainder going to the GPU; that a clear proof of the slavery existing in the Soviet Union was the fact that the Soviet commandant of the city of Lauterburg had ordered all the officers to get married; that the Soviet authorities in Germany were planning to arrest all school-teachers; that Soviet soldiers robbed German intellectuals of their private cars with the connivance of the Soviet authorities.

When he finished reading Lubentsov laid the slip of paper on the table and began pacing the room, collecting his thoughts.

He still found it hard to believe that this man had lived and breathed alongside him, had walked in this very room in fact, his feet touching the same strips of parquet; that he had sat on that couch there, saluted, talked, smoked cigarettes—in a word had acted like any other human being. But, hard though it was to conceive of it, that was how it had been, and he must now try to consider the whole thing calmly and try to understand it.

Never before had Lubentsov done such hard thinking. He had difficulty in marshalling his thoughts and trying to form a clear picture of what had happened and of his own part in that picture. Who was he, Lubentsov? A man who was blind to everything that went on about him, a smug, self-satisfied person? Or a healthy normal human being who had deep faith in people and who was incapable of conceiving the depths of baseness to which evil men could stoop? For the first time Lubentsov paused to think how the Vorobeitsev affair would affect his own position. His heart sank, for he valued his reputation very highly and he strove to guard it against any blemish. But that was not the main thing at the moment. What was most important was to explain for himself the entire course of events, to understand how it had all come to pass.

In the midst of this brutal and remorseless self-examination, Lubentsov heard the door open and in the dim rectangle of light appeared the figure of Kasatkin. When he came nearer and Lubentsov saw his grim, tortured face, a wave of remorse and compassion engulfed him, and he said:

"You were right, Ivan Mitrofanovich."

But Kasatkin ignored this attempt to bridge the gulf that had opened between them.

"I consider it necessary to arrest Captain Chokhov at once," he said coldly. "They were friends. They arrived together and they were together a good deal of the time. Chokhov is known to have been at Merker's flat with ... er ... with Vorobeitsev. He got a motor-cycle from Mer-

ker. Besides," Kasatkin went on in a harsh voice, avoiding Lubentsov's eyes, "I consider that we made a mistake in allowing Professor Sebastian to go." He said "we," but he clearly meant "you." "Sebastian will not return," he went on. "There is evidence that he was recently visited by some high-placed American officials who helped his son to persuade him to run away to the West. As a warning I consider it necessary to arrest Sebastian's daughter and some of her closest associates. General Kuprianov agrees with me. I have just spoken with him on the telephone."

Kasatkin spoke quietly but firmly, in a tone of authority, for he obviously considered that Lubentsov, being guilty of a grave blunder of which he, Kasatkin, had duly warned him, had lost the right to protest.

Lubentsov froze.

"What does this mean, Major?" he demanded. "You speak as if you had been put in my place. Have I been removed? If so, where is the order? Why did you speak to General Kuprianov without my knowledge? Chokhov will not be arrested so long as I am here. And no one will be arrested as a warning. I daresay you believe you are being extremely firm and resolute. But you are nothing but a panic-monger. What has happened after all? One scoundrel has run away. Yet that is enough for you to lose your head and begin suspecting everybody. You lack coolheadedness and self-control, Major, and that is a big shortcoming in a Communist and a Soviet officer."

Turning away from Kasatkin, he picked up the receiver and asked to be connected with General Kuprianov. The general was not in his office, and the telephone operator called him at his home.

"Kuprianov on the wire," came the general's voice at length.

"Lubentsov speaking, General," said Lubentsov, and even at that distance he felt the coldness of the general's

curt acknowledgement. But he proceeded to state his case firmly, paying no heed to the general's brief interjections and his repeated attempts to cut him short. "You may remove me," he said. "That is your right. You are at liberty to recall me at once. But I warn you, Comrade General, that I will not stand aside and allow us to be panicked into committing stupidities. I shall answer for what I have done, but permit me to face the music unaided. Please do not take any steps over my head until I am removed. I know the situation here better than anyone else. That is what I was put here for. Let us not give the enemy food for slander and ridicule. I am not afraid of anything—at least not for myself, I am only afraid of injuring our cause. You trust *me*, I hope? Or has the defection of one scoundrel undermined your faith in everybody? I have not lost my faith in anyone and I would consider myself the most miserable of creatures if, because of that ... because of Vorobeitsev ... I should lose my faith in humanity in general. That is how I look at it." His voice suddenly trembled, and he stopped speaking. "Very well," he said at last in reply to the general. "I shall be with you tomorrow at eleven sharp."

He hung up, or rather tried to, for he fumbled a long time with the receiver. Ashamed of his emotion, he swore under his breath.

"You may go," he told Kasatkin.

11

Around six o'clock in the morning Lubentsov dropped into a heavy sleep from which he awoke a couple of hours later feeling remarkably light-hearted. He had a pleasant dream and for a few minutes after he opened his eyes he was conscious only of a sense of inexplicable happiness. And then the memory of what had happened swept over

him and he felt a stab of intolerable pain. Nevertheless, he forced himself to dress and wash and prepare to meet another day.

His first visit that morning was to Erika Sebastian. She did not hide her surprise on seeing him.

"I have come to call on you," he said with a smile.

"I am glad to see you," she murmured, and since Lubentsov always talked to her chiefly about her work, she began at once to tell him about the seminar.

"You are a *molodets*," he said, using the Russian word. She laughed.

"And you are in an excellent humour this morning," she remarked.

"Yes," he said. "So I am. A very good humour."

"Why?"

"No particular reason. Can't one be in a good mood without any particular reason?"

"Yes," she replied gravely. "But we only think there is no reason. That is because we cannot always guess what the reason is. But there must always be a reason."

"You're getting close to Marxism there," he laughed. "How is your father? Have you heard from him?"

"No. But I expect him back in three or four days. Letters from Western Germany take so long that there is not much use writing. The two parts of Germany seem to be drifting farther and farther apart all the time. They are like two separate states. It's dreadful! How long will this go on?"

"Who knows?"

"I thought you knew everything. And that if there was something you didn't know you made it your business to find out at once."

"I do my best," Lubentsov said with a laugh. "But you are right, it is a great pity that Germany is still divided, that Professor Sebastian and his daughter live in one Germany, and his son in another. Hardly a normal situ-

ation. I am sure that the Soviet Government at any rate will do all it can to reunite the two Germanies. Unfortunately that does not depend only on us."

"Yes. I believe the Americans are against it."

"What makes you think so?"

"I gathered as much from what was said when my brother was here with Major Collins. Father did not agree with them."

Lubentsov's eyes lit up.

"Did he argue with them?"

"Oh yes."

"And on whose side were you?"

She smiled.

"On yours," she said and blushed. Then, laying her hand on a small heap of books on the table, she went on quickly, "I have been reading a good many Soviet books lately. Some of them are very interesting."

In coming to Sebastian's house Lubentsov, notwithstanding the emphatic tone he had taken with Kasatkin the previous day, had been prompted by a nagging suspicion that Erika too might be mixed up in the plot, that Sebastian had not gone on a short visit but had run away. In spite of himself the seed of suspicion sown by Kasatkin was beginning to take root. He told himself that he must shake off that curse and he shook it off. His talk with Erika calmed his fears. It showed him once again how groundless Kasatkin's attitude was. And he told himself that it was a very bad thing for a Communist to be suspicious. Suspicion was the very opposite of vigilance, and when the former was substituted for the latter the consequences were disastrous. Suspicion, unless spread deliberately with vicious intent, was the fruit of panic, lack of faith in oneself and others. Yes, in the Vorobeitsev affair he, Lubentsov, had been lacking in vigilance. But he must not, he dare not swing to the opposite extreme.

On taking leave of Erika, Lubentsov did something he had never done in his life—he kissed her hand, arousing a whole tumult of emotions in her heart.

Now that the first numbing shock of the Vorobeitsev affair had worn off, he was able calmly to assess the situation. He now saw clearly what course of action he must take.

For one thing he must ascertain why Vorobeitsev had turned traitor. His character, of course, had something to do with it. But a man might have an unpleasant character, without necessarily being a traitor.

The question troubled Lubentsov, and he determined to find the answer.

But it was now nearly nine o'clock and he had to be at Kuprianov's office at eleven. He found Voronin waiting for him outside the commandant's office. A glance at the sergeant was enough to tell him that Voronin knew all. He did not say anything, but the look he gave Lubentsov was more eloquent than words.

"Get the car," said Lubentsov.

Five minutes later the car drove up.

"I'm coming with you," said Voronin.

"Very well."

They rode in silence, the heavy silence of men who had no need for words to express the pain they shared at this moment. For these men were more than brothers, they were bound by bonds of understanding and affection which are often stronger than the bonds of kinship.

It was not until they had entered Altstadt that Voronin spoke.

"If you go away," he said, "take me with you."

Lubentsov entered Kuprianov's office to find some ten strangers there, two of them generals. This was most unexpected. He had assumed that he would have a private talk with Kuprianov. And now ten pairs of eyes looked at him with cold hostility as at a man whose

merits had long been forgotten, and the whole of whose past life, whatever it might have been, had been blotted out by what had just occurred. They had obviously been talking of him, and in far from flattering terms. The hard expression of those relentless eyes dismayed Lubentsov for it was quite new to him. Yes, he had been one of the "lucky" ones, a man who had always been loved and esteemed by all who knew him, and whom everyone, chiefs and subordinates alike, had treated with affection and trust. This sudden sharp change of attitude to him cut him to the quick.

Then they began to speak, and their words were as hostile as their eyes. They spoke of him as if he were not present and as if he were directly to blame for Vorobeitsev's defection and hence objectively no less of a criminal than Vorobeitsev. He wanted to ask them how they could do this to him, how dared they speak of him in such terms. But he listened in silence for he knew that such questions would only evoke another storm of indignation. Someone asked whether it was true that his assistant had demanded that Vorobeitsev be arrested and that he, Lubentsov, had forbidden it. Yes, he replied, it was true. He wanted to say that he could not possibly have suspected Vorobeitsev of harbouring such intentions; that, moreover, if Vorobeitsev had been arrested he would at best have been sent back to the U.S.S.R. and, being an enemy and a traitor, would have continued to disguise his true feelings as he had done hitherto; at best he would have been charged with racketeering but at heart he would be a traitor who could at any moment, perhaps a more critical moment than this, betray his country. Lubentsov wanted to say all this but he said nothing because he knew that his words would be misconstrued and would only be taken as proof that he did not wish to admit his mistakes. And so he confined himself to admitting his guilt over and over again.

When it was his turn to speak, he said that in the final analysis it was not so much a matter of establishing the extent of his guilt as of making sure that the affair would not lead to worse blunders. He declared that he was ready to take all the blame, but he asked that he be given a chance to repair the damage himself and to handle the situation as he saw fit.

And although many of those present recognized in their heart of hearts that he was right and that there was indeed no grounds for suspecting all and everyone, they nevertheless continued to attack him and his staff, to question the political reliability of all the Lauterburg officers, and level all sorts of accusations that taxed Lubentsov's self-control almost beyond endurance.

Nevertheless, his reputation was so good and his views as to the further plan of action so convincing that no final verdict was pronounced on him at this session. He was told to return to his post. The following evening there would be a Party meeting at which the work of the Lauterburg commandant's office would be discussed.

On this Lubentsov left the meeting and drove back to Lauterburg. And again neither he nor Voronin spoke throughout the journey.

Lubentsov lost no time on returning to Lauterburg in starting the investigation. He visited all three flats which Vorobeitsev had occupied at various times during his stay in Lauterburg. He found out all about his automobile manipulations, and ascertained the exact quantity of goods Vorobeitsev had received from the local creamery, sugar refinery and distillery. With the help of Kranz and from Merker's testimony, he was able to form a clear picture of the entire range of Vorobeitsev's interests.

He established beyond all doubt that Vorobeitsev had not discussed politics with anyone or conducted any anti-Soviet propaganda. He had lived exclusively for gain and had thought of little else. He craved wealth and lux-

ury and believed in easy living. Had it not been for fear of exposure and punishment after Merker's arrest he would never have run away.

In other words, it was his greed and acquisitiveness that had made Vorobeitsev turn traitor. For Lubentsov this discovery was of vital importance not only from the viewpoint of his own self-defence but because it helped to answer a question that had weighed so heavy on his mind. It was again a matter of the two opposing worlds. Our world appealed to the finer sides of human character because it stood for a just distribution of wealth, forged ahead towards lofty goals, honoured the man of labour and believed in his future. The other world played on man's base instincts and drew its supporters from among the selfish and greedy who cared nothing for the common cause or for anything but their own petty interests. Renouncing everything but a cutthroat impulse of personal gain, this second world lured and beckoned to those who placed private wealth above all else.

But was Vorobeitsev the only one? Were there so few people of that sort? But not all greedy and grasping people are traitors to their country, Lubentsov argued with himself, and the conclusion he arrived at finally was this: not all money-grubbers are traitors, but all traitors are bound to be money-grubbers.

In other words, lust for private wealth in a community that has renounced capitalist property drags a man down into the dregs of society. A person who does not share the ideals to which the community is dedicated becomes a hypocrite and a liar. He conceals his thoughts, deceives his fellow-men and often himself, and thus may even rise high in public life, but sooner or later he is bound to be exposed or to expose himself.

Lubentsov went again to the last flat Vorobeitsev had occupied and carefully examined everything in it. All the evidence pointed to a life of debauchery and petty de-

pravity. Looking at the array of empty bottles, the indecent photographs and the other mute witnesses of nocturnal carousals, Lubentsov was shocked and disgusted at the frightful waste of health and vigour. But at the same time he had a momentary feeling of envy at this complete freedom from all sense of duty and responsibility, this wild, carefree existence of self-indulgence and pleasure. Lubentsov reflected that he too was by nature something of a Sybarite, but he felt that if he were to let himself go, he would not indulge himself with doors locked and curtains drawn. If he were to go in for this sort of thing, he thought, he would "raise the devil," enjoy himself to the full regardless of what anyone might think. But he did not do so, because for him the most important thing in life, that which gave life its meaning and purpose, was the triumph of the new world, the happiness of the millions. Without this there could be no pleasure in life for him.

He forced himself to return to the commandant's office after the investigation was over, forced himself, because the House on the Square which had been his home was his home no longer. Gloomy faces met him everywhere. Even the clatter of the soldiers' boots seemed to have an ominous ring. All sorts of commissions arrived. And it was only with an effort that he was able to answer their innumerable questions and to keep his temper.

His usual reception hours were from five to seven. Just before five Captain Chegodayev came into his office.

"There are about twenty people waiting to see you. Shall I send them away?"

He looked at Lubentsov earnestly, his small eyes full of devotion and sympathy. But Lubentsov returned his look coldly.

"Certainly not," he said. "I see no reason to interrupt our routine. Call them in."

He received the visitors one by one while Chegodayev and Ksenia looked on in silent amazement as he chatted and joked with his callers in his usual manner. The reticent Ksenia did not show her feelings, but Chegodayev who like everyone else in the House on the Square these days was nervous and upset, escaped at the first opportunity and went in to see Menshov.

"I can't stand it any longer," he cried. "It makes my heart ache to look at him."

But in a few minutes Ksenia came in with the message that some people had come from the ore mining department on urgent business and Lubentsov was asking for him. Chegodayev sighed and obeyed the summons.

At about seven o'clock in the evening Lubentsov, Kasatkin, Yavorsky, Chegodayev and Menshov left for Altstadt to attend the Party meeting.

12

When the Lauterburg group entered the hall, all eyes turned to them. For a moment Lubentsov hesitated at the door, then, looking neither to right nor left walked quickly to the front of the hall where the first two rows of seats were unoccupied.

"Let's sit down here," he said.

"These seats are probably reserved for the big chiefs," Menshov mumbled.

"Never mind," countered Lubentsov. "Today we can enjoy the privilege of sitting beside them."

They settled down and stared straight before them at the empty platform with its red-covered table and rostrum complete with table-lamp, water decanter and tumbler.

Lubentsov was tense. He seemed to feel the stares of the people behind him, and the faces of friends and

acquaintances who probably were seated in the hall passed one after the other before his mind's eye. With every minute his spirits sank lower and lower.

At last General Kuprianov accompanied by several colonels entered by a side door and walked towards the front rows where Lubentsov and his comrades were sitting. The hall rose. The general said, "At ease," and Lubentsov found himself standing when everyone else had sat down. He felt uncomfortable at the thought that this might be interpreted as a sign that he was trying to curry favour with his superiors now that he had got into a mess. He dropped down quickly into his seat.

Lieutenant-Colonel Gorbenko, the secretary of the Party organization, went up to the platform. He was a friend of Lubentsov's, a clever, sensible man for whom a big future was generally predicted. Now his voice sounded solemn and his tired, kindly, slightly short-sighted eyes were stern.

How unlike himself he is today, thought Lubentsov, and all because of that wretched Vorobeitsev. For it was that petty, odious, miserable creature that was the cause of all this to-do. It was because of him that two hundred officers had gathered in this hall—all fine, admirable men, a credit to their nation, men who were carrying out one of the most difficult tasks Russians had ever been called upon to perform.

Gorbenko opened the meeting and called for nominations for the presidium. A lieutenant-colonel from the industrial division hurriedly climbed on the platform and read out a list of nominees, all of whom were elected. The general and the colonels got up slowly and walked to the platform, followed by the rest of the officers whose names had been on the list. When the presidium was seated, a colonel took the chair and gave the floor to Gorbenko.

On his way from the chairman's table to the rostrum Gorbenko glanced at Lubentsov, but meeting the latter's eyes, turned away. He took his place on the rostrum, laid down a sheet of paper in front of him and began reading, looking up at the hall at the end of each sentence as if wishing to create the impression that he was delivering an impromptu speech.

The personnel of the Lauterburg district commandant's office, he said, had carried out the democratization and denazification programmes in the district quite satisfactorily on the whole. However, the commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov, though he had done quite well in dealing with the Germans, had neglected educational work among the members of his staff. As a result of this, one of his officers had degenerated morally, had betrayed his country and run away to the American zone. This outrageous occurrence laid a dark stain of disgrace on the Lauterburg commandant's office and the Soviet military authorities in general. The blame for this rested with Lubentsov, who not only had neglected his officers, but had been so short-sighted politically as to refuse to detain and isolate the traitor when he still could have done so. He lacked the vigilance which every Communist must display, especially in the conditions in which Soviet people were placed in Germany, and this was a most serious offence. Major Kasatkin, Lubentsov's deputy, had filed a fully justified complaint with the Military Administration. Had it not been for Lubentsov's presumption and political blindness, the incident could never have occurred.

"I have known Lubentsov for a long time and have always considered him a capable, alert, serious-minded officer," Gorbenko concluded after a moment's pause. "But his conduct in this case compels us to reconsider our attitude towards him, to discuss his actions thoroughly

and seriously, and also to make a closer study of our entire personnel day in and day out, without making any allowances for past services."

Gorbenko was followed by an officer who accused Lubentsov of displaying a liberalism incompatible with the position he held. He went on to tell about the case of Professor Sebastian, whom Lubentsov had allowed to go to the Western zone, ostensibly to visit his son, in spite of the recent defection of the agricultural expert Professor Wildapfel. Lubentsov visited Sebastian far too often, and had even been at his daughter's birthday party, moreover, in mufti. It was known that Lubentsov had entertained Sebastian and an American spy named Major Collins. During his trips out of town Lubentsov often stayed overnight with Germans. He also had long talks not only with German workers, but with landlords as well. He had gone so far as to tell the Germans that reparations would be discontinued in time; he sympathized with the Germans, telling them that their life was hard, and giving them groundless promises that their living standards would be improved.

The third speaker said that if Lubentsov had displayed due vigilance he would have seen through Vorobeitsev long ago. Vorobeitsev had flouted discipline and together with a Captain Chokhov, who had previously served together with Lubentsov—Vorobeitsev himself had for a time served in the same division as Lubentsov—had time and again been guilty of breaches of discipline, showing up at his post late or not at all. But Lubentsov had merely rebuked this enemy of the people instead of punishing him.

As Lubentsov listened to all this he marvelled at his own outward calm. At first his heart had raced and pounded, but now he had calmed down and his heart beat with slow, heavy thuds. Each time a new speaker took the floor he wondered whether this one too would not find a single kind word to say about him. Would he too think of

only the bad things, or what could be made to seem bad? What did it all mean? Was he indeed so blind, phlegmatic, easy-going, presumptuous and arrogant as the speakers said? Was he practically another Vorobeitsev? Lubentsov wondered what the others in the hall thought of the things said about him, and concluded that they must share the views of the speakers for his accusers sounded so convincing that he himself was inclined at times to agree with them.

From time to time he cast a searching look at General Kuprianov who knew him better than anyone else, knew his every move and why he had acted as he had and not otherwise. What did General Kuprianov think? What would he say?

On his part the general looked every now and then at Lubentsov from the corner of his eye, and made a mental note of the exaggerations and distortions the speakers were guilty of. And yet he too turned more and more against Lubentsov.

The trouble was that Kuprianov firmly believed that he always respected the views of his officers, and it never occurred to him that the latter respected his views even more. He believed he was guided in his actions by the majority opinion, yet the majority took their cue from him. Often enough he turned to the leading functionaries of the Party organization to find out what the membership thought of one or another issue, for he sincerely wanted to know in order to be guided accordingly. But as it was, some of his subordinates either ignored the views of the membership or in presenting them to the general adapted them to his opinions—or if these were not known, to what he was expected to think—so that what he was told often had nothing in common with the prevailing sentiment. Had the general been informed of the actual opinion of others, he undoubtedly would have been guided by it, but since what he was told was really his own opinion,

the decisions he took were to all intents and purposes one-man decisions.

The same happened now in the Lubentsov affair.

The officers in the general's immediate environment knew that he was very much put out by what had happened. Hence the violence with which they attacked Lubentsov at the meeting. True, the tenor of their speeches was to some extent affected by respect for the general. But no small part was played by sycophantic repetition of views expressed and casual remarks made, often without due consideration, by the people "on top." The general, however, took the speeches he now heard for a free expression of public opinion, and he made up his mind that he had to take a very firm stand in the Lubentsov affair.

General Kuprianov was perhaps not consciously trying to play safe by dealing severely with Lubentsov, yet the fact was that by doing so he was mitigating his own guilt in the eyes of his superiors in Berlin and Moscow. For although he knew that he could hardly be blamed for an unpleasantness caused by an obscure officer serving in one of the many local commandant's offices, he was sufficiently well aware that some officers at higher levels insisted in cases like this on finding the guilty party, or if this was impossible, on pinning the blame on whoever bore the greatest responsibility, not because they wanted justice to triumph, but in order to clear themselves in the eyes of still higher levels.

Yet General Kuprianov was an honest man, and generous. He acted as he did because that was the accepted thing, although deep down he realized that Lubentsov's guilt was not as great as it was made to appear at the meeting and as he himself would make it appear when he took the floor. Yet for all that he allowed himself to be influenced by the mass hysteria which he himself un-

wittingly, perhaps, had helped to create, and he regarded Lubentsov with mounting animosity.

The meeting was adjourned and the hall emptied out. Kasatkin also went. After a while Chegodayev, Yavorsky and Menshov got up.

"Going to have a smoke," Chegodayev mumbled.

Lubentsov was left alone. He realized he should have gone out too. He knew he had the strength to face the others, mingle with them, and even exchange a few words with those who wanted to talk to him. But he no longer cared what people thought of him. Things could not be worse than they were. And he stayed where he was.

Soon he heard the hall filling again. His own officers too returned and sat down without a word. Finally the presidium took their places.

The next speaker was Major Pigarev. Lubentsov leaned back in his seat, curious to hear what he would have to say.

Pigarev began by saying he had known Lubentsov to be a good worker. But the trouble with him, the major said, was that he was too sure of himself. He had been praised too much. He had always been among the few commandants who had been held up as an example to all the others.

"Time and again I have heard all kinds of people praise Lubentsov," Pigarev said with unexpected malice. "And this is the result," he added, in a tone of hypocritical sadness that amazed Lubentsov for it was so unlike the Pigarev he had known. "He was always handing out advice and quoting German poets.... Comrade Lubentsov got swell-headed. That's why he wouldn't listen to Kasatkin.... It's easy enough to hoodwink the Germans by quoting Goethe or Schiller from memory." (General Kuprianov nodded approvingly.) "Culture's a good thing, but there's no need to kowtow to bourgeois culture either."

(General Kuprianov nodded again.) "As for Sebastian, Lubentsov was always praising his honesty and telling me what an interesting person he was.... That's just what that fellow wanted—led Lubentsov by the nose and ran away to the West; just try and catch him now." (General Kuprianov nodded gloomily.) "But the biggest disgrace for all of us is the Vorobeitsev business. Yes, for all of us. And for that he's got to be punished!" His voice rose to a crescendo and, carried away by his own eloquence, he brought his fist down on the edge of the rostrum. "Lubentsov is supposed to be a modest man, with simple tastes and all that sort of thing. But that kind of calculated modesty and simplicity is not worth a damn! Let him live as he pleases, but let him see what's happening round him, let him learn to expose our enemies. Let him not put on airs! Let him not think that he knows better than anybody else!"

There was a burst of applause. Pigarev tossed his head. Lubentsov was shocked to note how closely this gesture resembled one of Albina's mannerisms.

13

At midnight the meeting was adjourned until seven the next evening. Out in the street, Lubentsov lost his companions in the crowd and stopped to watch the motorcars drive up to the kerb one after another, their parking lights casting a dull gleam on the rain-washed cobblestones. Shadowy figures approached them, climbed in and drove off. Gradually the cars and people thinned out, and for the first time in his life Lubentsov felt alone, cut off from his fellow-men by some invisible wall. The feeling persisted even when his own car drove up and Chegodayev stuck his huge head out of the window to say, "Here we are, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel."

"Let's change places," Lubentsov said, and Chegodayev moved up front next to the driver to let Lubentsov have the back seat to himself. Before Lubentsov got in, however, an officer from the car behind came up and said, "Get going, you're holding up the traffic." Recognizing Lubentsov, he muttered an apology and stood staring at him as if he had seen a ghost.

Lubentsov got into his car and it moved off. He now withdrew completely within himself, still weighed down by the feeling of utter loneliness that had gripped him so suddenly. A sense of shame and bitterness towards his persecutors plunged him into the depths of despondency. Watching the rare village lights flash past in the otherwise unbroken darkness and listening to the whining of the wind against the windshield, he shuddered at the thought that perhaps he was fated all his life to hurtle thus past darkened houses and people too concerned with their own troubles to give any thought to him, unwanted, alone in the outer darkness, cut off from the rest of the world by this box of glass and steel.

It was not until he was at home in Lauterburg that he came to himself, and he realized with a shock that he had no memory of having arrived, of having got out of the car and walked into the house. But here he was at home, and there was Voronin in the kitchen; he could hear his footsteps and the clatter of dishes—the sergeant-major was evidently preparing supper although he knew it would be rejected. Lubentsov had hardly eaten at all for days. Nevertheless, the clatter and bustle calmed him down somewhat.

He felt a desire to get up at tomorrow's meeting and tell his accusers, "You can all go to the devil! I refuse to listen to what you are saying, for I am not the man you have been talking about. I cannot accept responsibility for all these foul charges. However convincing your ac-

cusations might appear at the face of it and however friendly your admonitions might sound, everything you say is lies and slander."

Yet he knew that he could never say anything of the kind. He could not do it because he liked and respected these people, and chiefly because for him Party discipline was something inviolable, because he was accustomed to respect his comrades, value their opinion and always to search in their judgements, harsh as they might be, for the kernel of truth that could not be ignored. He had faith in the collective and had been brought up to believe that the collective was always bound to be right in the end.

Moreover, he was a soldier with a soldier's sense of duty. But now he realized that for years he had subjected himself to the severest self-control, that he himself had created invisible bonds that bound him hand and foot, and that he would never utter a word without preliminary deliberation or take a single step without having in mind the possible outside eyes that were watching him; he knew that he had trained himself in this inflexible self-discipline which was crushing him, making him calculating and pedantic to a point that was repulsive even to himself.

Yet all this he had done not for selfish reasons, not in order to rise above others like himself, but because he believed it to be essential to the common good. Without self-discipline there could be no discipline, and without discipline the great mission that had fallen to the lot of his generation could never be carried out.

Voronin came in with the dishes, stood by the table for a few minutes, then said:

"You ought to have a drink, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel, it helps."

"All right, let's have it."

Voronin brightened up at once. He dashed out and quickly returned with a bottle of vodka. He poured out a glass for Lubentsov and himself. They both drank.

"Now you need some sleep," Voronin said.

"Right, I'll go to bed."

At that point heavy footsteps sounded outside, the door opened, and in marched Chokhov. He was dressed as if for parade—his boots gleamed, the straps over his great-coat shone. His clean-shaven face was as stern and calm as ever. Yet there was something unusually forbidding about his appearance, but what it was, Lubentsov could not make out at first. Then he realized what was wrong: Chokhov, in non-combat uniform complete with red hat-band and gold shoulder-straps, had a machine pistol dangling from a strap slung round his neck.

"Sit down," Lubentsov said.

Chokhov did not obey. Instead he laid a sheet of paper folded in four on the table and began speaking in a low, distinct voice.

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," he said, "permit me. I alone am to blame for everything. It was I who begged you to take on Vorobeitsev. And I knew the sort of person Vorobeitsev was, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel, but I didn't say anything to you. I was too stupid to see how it would all end. It's all my fault. I've written it all down here. That's all I have to say." After a moment's pause he went on in a hoarse voice, "Please forgive me, Sergei Platonovich, but that scoundrel. . . ." His voice broke.

"Where are you off to?" Lubentsov cried, as the meaning of all this dawned on him. "What are you going to do? Are you mad?"

"I've got to do it," Chokhov said in a level voice. "I only need two days' leave. That's all."

"You're mad!" cried Lubentsov.

"I must kill him," Chokhov said.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" Lubentsov said. "A fine mess you'd put me in! Take off your coat! Do you hear me, Chokhov?"

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," Voronin broke in, taking a step towards Lubentsov. "I think he's right. That scoundrel must be wiped off the face of the earth. Let me go with the captain. You needn't worry, we'll do it so neatly nobody'll ever know anything about it. You can trust Sergeant-Major Voronin. You haven't forgotten what I did during the war, have you? How many prisoners did we bring in together?"

"You too?" Lubentsov said reproachfully to Voronin. "Perhaps I ought to come along, eh?" He smiled wistfully. "Oh, I'm sure we'd carry out the patrol very neatly and bring the traitor back to Lauterburg. And maybe pick up someone else besides while we're at it, eh? You're a fine pair, both of you! Captain Chokhov, consider yourself confined to barracks—here, in my quarters. Put down that gun. What else have you got? A knife? Lay it down. Take off your belt. You're under arrest. And don't look at me as if I were Vorobeitsev." He tossed down another vodka and continued, "To hell with him. The best way to punish him is to let him live. Let him live alone with his own baseness. Take off your coat, Vasily Maximovich. Sit down. Is he really such a terrible loss? To hell with him, I say. Perhaps it's just as well that he showed his true colours instead of still being among us, deceiving us, letting us think he was one of us. He's not the first or the last one of his kind. Cases like this are not so unnatural as you might think under the present circumstances, with the two great camps at grips with each other. Then why should we allow ourselves to give way to despair? Have another drink, and since you're under arrest and in no hurry to go anywhere sit up for a while with me, or go to bed if you prefer to. And if I am arrested tonight, which is quite possible, let them take both of us at once."

Chokhov walked over to the window with a firm step and pressed his forehead against the glass, blinking away the tears that suddenly filled his eyes. He stood thus for a minute before turning to Lubentsov.

"I'll go and bring my motor-cycle into the yard," he said. He went out and soon returned.

It was already dawn when Chokhov and Voronin dozed off. Lubentsov continued to walk up and down the room, stopping every now and then to look tenderly at Chokhov asleep on the sofa. He remembered seeing Chokhov asleep before—a year ago, but so much had happened in these twelve months that it seemed ages. With his firm mouth relaxed, Chokhov looked very young, he was breathing fitfully and every now and then he heaved a deep sigh. Lubentsov picked up the sheet of paper Chokhov had laid on the table and tore it up without reading it.

At nine o'clock Lubentsov went to the office. First he summoned Yavorsky. Judging by his bloodshot eyes and pallid face, he too had not had much sleep.

"Have you seen Langheinrich?" Lubentsov asked.

"No."

"You should have. We need a Landrat, don't we? You ought to call him in."

"He doesn't want the job."

"He doesn't want it? That makes no difference. He's the best man for the post. Professor Sebastian had weighty reasons for recommending him. Ask him to come over at once."

"Right."

"That's all for the moment. Send in Chegodayev."

"I see that the pits have not fulfilled their plan for the past ten days," Lubentsov said when Chegodayev entered. "Have you taken the matter up with the pit managers?"

"Not yet."

"Let's go down right now."

"Good."

They drove down to one of the pits, where they found the production council, headed by Lubentsov's old acquaintance Hans Eperle, in session in the manager's office. Lubentsov, displeased with the lack of spirit shown by the speakers, took the floor and said that the workers must not give anyone grounds for saying they could not manage the pit—the excellent performance during the previous ten days showed what could be done if they worked properly.

After that he went somewhere else and attended to some other business, though later he found it difficult to remember whom he had seen and what they had spoken about. On returning to the office, he left Chegodayev in charge, dismissed the car, and set out on foot for the former headquarters of the British commandant where the teachers' seminar had been opened.

The cool entrance hall was deserted. Indeed it seemed as if there was nobody in the whole building. Inside, however, he heard a barely audible voice carrying through a half-open door. In the next hall too someone was speaking. The atmosphere was that of a school during class hours and Lubentsov half expected the doors to be flung open at any moment and the pupils to troop out into the corridor in a noisy throng.

"Herr Lubentsov!" a woman's voice exclaimed. He turned to see Frau Wisetzki coming from another corridor. Smiling broadly she came towards him, followed by another woman.

While Lubentsov was talking to Frau Wisetzki a bell rang and the corridor filled quickly. In a few minutes the commandant was surrounded by smiling, friendly faces. Everybody greeted him warmly, obviously pleased to see him there. His heart contracted and it cost him some effort to force himself to smile to these people who had no suspicion of the weight that lay so heavy on him.

Then he saw Erika. She hurried towards him, her face alight with welcome.

"At last you've come to see us," she said. "If you wait a minute I shall make the arrangements.... You will say a few words to our future teachers, won't you?"

"Not today," Lubentsov said. "I'll come again in a day or two." After a moment's thought he added, "Or I'll send my assistant—he'll do just as good a job, and perhaps better, than I."

Erika smiled doubtfully.

In the meantime the lecturers gathered round, among them Lerche, who conducted a course in Marxism-Leninism. He told Lubentsov he liked the work and thought that perhaps teaching was his real vocation.

Lubentsov already knew that Lerche was giving up his post as leader of the district organization of the Communist Party, and although he had never thought him well fitted for the work—Lerche was too inflexible, too hidebound, too violently disposed towards all Social-Democrats—he nevertheless was sorry to see him go. In the course of the months they had been working together Lubentsov had come to like this German Communist for his incorruptible honesty, selflessness and implacable hatred of enemies, even if he sometimes unjustly included in this category people who were not enemies. Now that the Communists and Social-Democrats were uniting in a single Socialist Party, Lerche himself realized that he had to retire from leading Party work. Lubentsov was pleased to note that he did not seem to mind; that he had become more tractable and considerate towards others.

"Now everybody's grown wise, it's not hard to find a successor for me," Lerche said with a touch of irony, then added earnestly, "We've got a strong organization now and plenty of good people."

The bell rang and the corridor emptied. Only Erika remained.

"You look tired," she said.

"I've been very busy, Erika."

She sighed. "One does not spare one's efforts in the name of a great cause."

Lubentsov looked up in surprise. She had never spoken in this tone before. At first he thought she was deliberately mocking at him, but she was serious and her eyes looked straight into his.

Erika, woman-like, had been guided in her acceptance of the new outlook less by abstract reasoning than by her deep affection for the man who represented that outlook. To believe in Socialism she first had had to learn to believe in Lubentsov and be carried away by his personal charm. And falling in love with him, she accepted the views he held. With the fervour of a recent proselyte she read everything she could lay her hands on about the U.S.S.R. and Communist philosophy, and accepted the new views unquestioningly, simply because they were Lubentsov's views. She would not tolerate any critical remarks concerning the outlook she had come to share in such a purely feminine way; indeed, her inflexibility was at once naive and charming and perhaps a little absurd. It was only a good deal later that her new views on life began to assert themselves independently of her emotions.

"How is your father?" Lubentsov asked casually as they faced each other in the half-gloom of the vestibule. "Have you heard from him?"

"No, he hasn't written. There's hardly any point in writing. He'll be back any day now."

"I see."

She accompanied him to the front stairs. A chill blast of wind met them.

"You'd better go inside," Lubentsov said. "You might catch cold."

"No," she said. Then she added, "Father is sure to be back within the next few days. He may be absent-minded but he never breaks a promise."

"Of course not."

They parted.

If I was mistaken in him, thought Lubentsov, I can console myself with the knowledge that he has deceived his own daughter as well. Unless she's the best actress and the biggest liar the world has ever known.

14

Lubentsov found Langheinrich, his wife Marta and Captain Yavorsky waiting for him at the office. All three rose when he entered. Marta shyly withdrew into a corner of the outer office to be out of the way, but Lubentsov invited her to join them in his office.

"Come in, Marta," he said. "We have a serious matter to discuss and we need your help."

They went in. Kasatkin was there at his desk. Lubentsov cast a quick glance at him. He did not look at all well. There were deep creases on his forehead; he too had evidently had a bad night.

Lubentsov seemed to be in excellent spirits. "Sit down, Comrades," he said cordially, leading Langheinrich and his wife over to the sofa. "I've enjoyed your hospitality on several occasions, but this is the first time you have visited me. Will you have some tea?"

They both refused.

"Well, you probably know why I've asked you here," Lubentsov began.

"Yes, we know," said Marta.

"You aren't happy about it?"

"No, we are not," Marta said. "Quite the contrary. How can we leave the village? There's the farm to take care of . . . and in general Langheinrich won't be equal to it."

"Wives are always apt to underestimate their husbands," Lubentsov said, smiling.

"She's right," Langheinrich said. He was ill at ease and there was a pleading note in his voice. "You shouldn't have picked me. Professor Sebastian's quite another matter—he's clever and has influence. But I. . . ."

"It was Professor Sebastian who suggested you," Lubentsov said. "He has a higher opinion of you than your wife. And so have I."

Langheinrich, who had been staring at the floor until now, looked up at Lubentsov.

"What about Professor Sebastian?" he put in with a touch of suspicion. "What is he going to do? Is he leaving Lauterburg? Is he going for good?"

"He's not leaving for good," Lubentsov replied, with a glance at Kasatkin from the corner of his eyes. "He's going back to teaching. After all, he is a scientist. The University has been re-opened in Halle and needs teachers. That's important too."

Langheinrich looked at Lubentsov questioningly. Then his eyes dropped again.

"The Party district committee also supports your candidacy," Lubentsov went on. "If necessary, it could pass a decision on the matter which you would obey, is that not so? Party discipline, Marta! But that's not the point. We would like you to undertake this work voluntarily, of your own accord. When a person undertakes something willingly, he is bound to do a better job of it. You could try, couldn't you, and if nothing comes of it, we'll let you go back to the village. I promise you that. And Comrade Kasatkin will also give his promise—in case I go away. Is that not so, Comrade Kasatkin?" he continued in Russian to Kasatkin. "Tell him that if he cannot cope with the job, someone else will be found to take his place."

Kasatkin who understood German but either could not or was shy to speak it, replied in Russian:

"Of course."

"There, Comrade Kasatkin also gives you his promise," said Lubentsov.

"Are you going away?" Langheinrich asked.

"I may take my holidays," Lubentsov replied quickly. Then he went over to Marta and sat down facing her. "You must understand, Marta. This is very important. Education has nothing to do with it. There are plenty of learned idlers, aren't there? Your husband has a clear conscience and a good head on his shoulders. You can't deny that, can you, Marta? You must not think only of yourself and your own convenience."

"Of course not," Marta said, avoiding Lubentsov's eyes.

"There you are," Lubentsov exclaimed, turning to Langheinrich. "Marta's agreed."

Langheinrich smiled.

"That's not enough," he said. "I have a mind of my own, haven't I?"

"Don't pretend to be so independent," Lubentsov said, smiling. "You can't fool me. I knew very well that everything depended on Marta. Otherwise, why should she have come along? So you'll make a try at it, Langheinrich? Good. We'll help you."

Langheinrich shrugged his shoulders. Lubentsov slapped him on the back and said in Russian, "*Molodets*!"

"I never thought anyone could persuade me," Marta said as she got up.

"It's necessary for our common cause," Lubentsov said.

He saw Langheinrich and Marta to the door, and when they were gone, he slowly turned to face Kasatkin and Yavorsky. The animation that had lighted up his face a moment ago was gone. The two officers said nothing.

"You must help him, Comrades," Lubentsov said. "Give him your support. He is a good man and will surely cope with the work. He was only pretending to be unwilling, I

am sure. Actually he was already thinking of how to make things run smoothly. I know him. You will help him, won't you?"

"Of course we shall," Yavorsky said in a low voice.

Kasatkin only nodded his head and went out.

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," Yavorsky stammered. "I would like to . . . to say something." He was pale and agitated, and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. His full lips trembled as he wiped his glasses. "I will have to speak at the meeting tonight. I was asked to. You know how I respect you, how much I value your friendship. Yes, I admire you for many reasons. But Comrade Gorbenko asked me to get up and speak. I want you to understand my position."

Lubentsov gave him a long, cold look, laughed dryly and walked out, slamming the door behind him. But no sooner had he done so than he felt sorry for Yavorsky. He went back and, going over to the window, said, "That's all right. Go ahead, don't let it worry you."

Menshov came in with some papers for the commandant to sign. Lubentsov put his signature to them. At a few minutes to five he got up. His face darkened.

"Time to go," he said. A heavy silence fell over the room.

"Time to go," he repeated. He put on his cap and went downstairs. The cars were waiting at the curb.

It was nearly seven when they pulled up in front of the building where the meeting was to take place. Looking up at it, Lubentsov shuddered, and the events of the day —his visit to the pit, his conversations with Lerche and Erika, and his talk with Langheinrich—receded into the distance. It was as if he had split into two personalities remote and utterly different from each other. His present self wondered how he ever had been able to live that other life without being crushed under the weight of the second existence which was beginning now.

There was still some twenty minutes left before the meeting started and Lubentsov forced himself to walk about in the lobby, nodding to those who greeted him and pretending not to see those who clearly tried to avoid him. As the lobby filled, he drew to one side to watch. He knew many of the men there, of others he had heard much that was complimentary. Most of them were young men who had seen much in spite of their years, serious men with rows of decoration ribbons on their tunics. Lubentsov was conscious of seeing them for the first time as an outsider, for hitherto he had always been one of them. The ordeal of the past days had made him sentimental, and a warm affection welled up in him for all these men accompanied by a stab of pain at the thought that his feeling for them was not reciprocated.

Anxiously he scanned their open faces thinking with a heavy heart: Will we, ordinary Russians, be equal to our Soviet destiny, will we be able to do all the great things expected of us and justify the great hopes reposed in us? Or will we allow ourselves to be swamped by the petty things of life, will our enthusiasm cool into pure routine, complacency and a desire for a quiet life?

Never before had he asked himself these questions and he answered them now with a fervour close to exaltation: Yes, we will justify the trust placed in us, we will carry out our great plans, we will not stray from the correct path. And the fact that his heart overflowed with affection for his comrades and confidence in them and himself at this crucial moment when his position was so desperate, proved more conclusively than ever that his faith in the future was a reflection of objective reality and not the result of thoughtless optimism.

The bell pealed, calling the meeting to order.

Opening the meeting, Gorbenko announced that it could not end that night, for at nine o'clock some of the leading comrades would have to leave for an important

conference with representatives of the German parties and trade unions, and the presidium had considered it inadvisable to limit the number of speakers or the time allowed them; a great many had already asked for the floor. Lubentsov's spirits fell; he had hoped that it would all be over and done with tonight.

Gripping the back of the chair in front, Lubentsov settled down to listen. He struggled for self-control, although time and again he wanted to jump up to refute a speaker. At the same time he tried, as he always did, to sort out everything that was reasonable and right in the turbid flood of accusations flowing from the speakers' stand. I must not look at things only from my own personal viewpoint, he told himself. I might well be wrong. Indeed, could the two hundred-odd people in this hall all be in league to crush me? Many of them may sincerely wish to point out my shortcomings and weaknesses so that I might be able to correct them. Hence I have no right to be bullheaded. I must try to understand them and put myself in their place. And for the hundredth time he told himself that if the Vorobeitsev incident had occurred in an area under the jurisdiction of any other commandant, he himself might have got up here and delivered just as pitiless a tirade as they. But would he? No, he would not; he would try to analyse things soberly. Or perhaps he only thought so now that he himself was in trouble.

Yavorsky got up to speak. Heavy beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. His speech was a confession neatly phrased and eloquently worded. He read it out from a sheet of paper, and the fact that it had been written in advance clashed strangely with the agitated voice in which he declared all the charges against Lubentsov to be well-founded. He seemed almost to take a morbid pleasure in disavowing both the commandant and everything he and his staff had accomplished in Lauterburg.

Kasatkin's speech was of quite another order. Lubentsov had been waiting for it anxiously. He set forth the facts, both positive and negative, without bias. Lubentsov was an honest Communist and a capable worker and there were a great many things which could be learned from him, he said. "I too learned much from Lubentsov," he declared firmly; there was a touch of challenge in his tone. But he was just as firm in attacking Lubentsov; he said he was too gullible, too trusting, and not sufficiently demanding of others. He wound up by insisting again on a number of arrests.

Lubentsov was almost grateful to Kasatkin for outlining his views without bias. But even now he could not agree that the Vorobeitsev case was justification for distrusting everybody.

Suddenly his thoughts turned to the Far East, and memories of his youth for some strange and inexplicable reason began to crowd out the present. He saw the taiga after the first snow-fall when the vast expanses of woodland turned into an open book for the keen-eyed observer who knew how to read the intricate pattern of fox and bear trails, the footprints of the grouse and the mighty imprints of the Ussuri tiger traced on the snowy blanket. If only there were some such signs to reveal the workings of the human mind!

Shortly before the meeting was adjourned a note was passed up to Lubentsov from the back of the hall, but he did not read it, for just then a colonel who had headed one of the investigation commissions that had been in Lauterburg in the last few days got up to speak. The colonel said that Lubentsov had shown himself lacking in the moral stamina required of a Communist when he allowed himself to become closely connected with the family of a German professor, Sebastian, whom he had advanced to the post of Landrat. He broadly hinted at intimacy between Lubentsov and Sebastian's daughter,

whom he had given a post at a training school for German teachers. The fact that Erika Sebastian had not gone to the West with her father was made to appear as proof of her attachment to Lubentsov. With much sarcasm the colonel lauded Lubentsov for his success with women and added that it would have been much more useful if Lubentsov had been able to impress Professor Sebastian, who now was in the American zone.

This colonel, with his low forehead, bulging eyes and thick sensual lips, spoke of Lubentsov's imaginary sins with such malice that Lubentsov felt himself hating the man. He was horrified at the thought that all these vile accusations might sound convincing to the people in the hall. Everything Lubentsov had ever done was painted in sinister colours. The very atmosphere grew heavy with suspicion and distrust—not only of himself, Lubentsov, but of everyone else in the hall. Is it possible that they do not realize this, he asked himself. Is there really no one here who is aware that the same could be said about anyone present, and that anyone thus attacked would find it just as difficult as I to refute the charges?

Towards the end of his speech the colonel pulled out a folded slip of paper from his tunic pocket and scanning his audience with an air of triumph slowly smoothed it and said:

"It turns out that Lubentsov considered himself something of a writer as well. I have here a literary work of his which was given to me by one of the officers serving at the Lauterburg commandant's office." The auditorium sat breathless, expecting some spectacular new disclosures. "Here it is; I shall read it to you. Comrade Lubentsov wrote it as an instruction to others, and entitled it 'Memorandum of a Soviet Commandant.' He takes it upon himself to advise Soviet commandants on how they should behave." The colonel began reading out the

"memorandum" Lubentsov had written to while away a sleepless night. And although there was nothing in it that might have cast the slightest shadow on its author, the colonel read it with an intonation which suggested that every word was a violation of some rule and every letter a dereliction of duty. Nobody saw anything reprehensible in it, but the tone in which it was read was sufficient to condemn it, if only because it was unlike the usual official instructions. Lubentsov's face burned with anger and shame as he listened to this public reading of something he had never intended for any eyes but his own. In the colonel's interpretation it sounded naive and foolish. Yes, naive and foolish, but nothing more. Yet, no doubt, to the meeting it stood for something criminal, something proscribed.

"There you are," the colonel wound up triumphantly. "He set out to teach us all, without submitting his masterpiece for authorization or seeking anyone's approval."

The next speaker was Menshov. When his name was called, he pushed his way past Lubentsov gingerly.

His speech was short, excited and confused. He said he had given the ill-starred "memorandum" to the colonel himself, not to be read out at the meeting, but as written evidence showing that Lubentsov had the right approach to his duties; it had been given to him by another officer on condition that he would not show it to anyone else. That other officer had copied it for himself without Lubentsov's knowledge. Lubentsov had never circulated it or given it to anyone to read. The officers of the Lauterburg commandant's office, Menshov went on, had always tried to work to the best of their ability and would now do their utmost to rectify whatever mistakes they had made. He left the rostrum, but before coming down the steps leading into the auditorium he paused and said in a desperate outburst:

"We hold nothing against Comrade Lubentsov. He did his best. He did everything he could—everything for the good of our country."

General Kuprianov looked bewildered. He shrugged his shoulders.

When Menshov returned to his seat, Lubentsov mechanically unfolded the note he had held in his hand.

"Your wife has arrived," he read. "She is waiting for you at the commandant's office, Room 63."

15

Lubentsov did not hear anything that was said after that. It was all too mad and incredible for him to take in the numerous accusations or to wax indignant at the host of petty injustices. His emotions were in a turmoil. His joy at Tanya's coming vied with a passionate wish that she were far away from this. Her arrival struck him as the greatest misfortune that had befallen him.

He had not been married long enough to know that a man's wife could not only be a partner in the great mystery of love, but also a staunch supporter in adversity, perhaps the staunchest in the world. But this was something he had yet to discover for himself; now her coming at this ghastly moment horrified him. Injured pride and pity for himself and her weighed heavily on his heart.

Yet hard as it was to reconcile himself to the thought that she was so close to him and his misfortune, the fact remained that she was waiting for him in Room 63.

He showed the note to Chegodayev sitting next to him. Chegodayev gasped and shook his head.

As soon as the meeting was adjourned, Lubentsov got up and hurried to the exit, but he got caught in the crowd that filled the aisle. He did not try to elbow his way through; on the contrary, he was grateful for his

slow progress towards the door, for it delayed if only for a few minutes the inevitable meeting with Tanya. All too soon he found himself in the street.

It was raining, and the pavements and house walls were gleaming under the downpour.

Lubentsov found his car and told the driver to take him to the local commandant's office.

As he ran up the stairs he saw Tanya on the first-floor landing—tall, slim, very pretty, but somehow different. Perhaps that was because he had never seen her in civilian clothes before. She was wearing a grey felt hat with a feather instead of a fur cap or blue beret, high-heeled shoes instead of the regulation boots, and a grey loose coat. A sudden fear gripped him as he silently approached her. He embraced her, and she pressed against him, trembling with joy. But her happiness only sharpened his pain.

She said something about luggage but Lubentsov's thoughts were so far from material things at the moment that he did not hear her. When she took him into Room 63 and he saw her suitcases, his first thought was how difficult it must have been for her to travel alone with so much luggage; he still imagined travel was like what it had been during the war. Then he picked up the heavy suitcases, taking pleasure in the sheer physical exertion. He wanted to carry them all, but with a laugh Tanya snatched one away from him and carried it herself. On the stairs they met some officers returning from the Party meeting, but Lubentsov ignored them; if he gave them a look it was only to see whether they were impressed by Tanya. As he hurried downstairs with her luggage he felt no load in the world was too heavy for him now.

Most of the way home they sat in silence holding hands.

Much to his surprise, Lubentsov found the table laid and Chegodayev, Menshov, Ksenia, Voronin and Kasat-

kin's wife Anastasia Stepanovna waiting for them. Chokhov was there too, as grim-looking and unperturbed as ever, and without his belt, for he was still under arrest, and Chokhov never violated regulations if he could help it.

The guests did their best to appear at their ease and the conversation was confined to Lauterburg and the life of the local Soviet colony. No one as much as hinted at what was happening at the commandant's office. Only Anastasia Stepanovna threw her arms round Tanya once with a sob. The others gave her a quick look of warning and she said nothing. Tanya probably attributed the impulsive gesture to her joy at meeting someone fresh from home.

The guests did not stay long. In spite of both Lubentsov's and Tanya's protests they all found pretexts for hurrying away. Only Chokhov remained. But after walking up and down nervously near the door for a while he too said:

"What about me, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel? May I go?"

Lubentsov did not understand the question at once.

"Of course you may," he said at last. "But you must come for breakfast, we shall be waiting for you."

Tanya and Lubentsov were alone.

In the morning, when she was still fast asleep and he was getting ready to leave for the office, he remembered how he had used to picture her arrival. He had planned to show her the district and introduce her to its people whom he had come to like; take her round the office, the streets, the cathedral and other spots of interest in Lauterburg; tour the Harz with her and show her its caves and waterfalls. All this was associated with his work, and work was for him the most important thing in

life. But now this was impossible, unnecessary and remote. It no longer was his life.

Not wishing to wake up Tanya, he left a note for her with instructions to help her make her way about and a promise to send over Ksenia.

At the office he could not tear his thoughts away from Tanya. Some forty minutes after his arrival he called up home, but no one answered. He was about to dash out to see whether she was all right when he saw her through the window. She was crossing the square towards the office. It was strange seeing her there, for in his mind she and the Lauterburg Square belonged to two entirely different worlds. It gave him pleasure just to see her walk, and he stood at the window gazing at her, completely forgetting that he had callers in his office, among them Lerche and Jost.

As he watched Tanya walking across the square it occurred to him that there were no two people in the world with the same gait and that if one were to make a careful study of it, one could perhaps in time learn to judge the character of a person by the way he walked. He liked the way Tanya walked—it was a firm gait, yet graceful and very feminine.

He tore himself away from the window and returned to his desk. But even as he conducted the conference he pictured Tanya approaching the building, looking up at the Soviet flag flying over the entrance, stopping by the sentry and asking him something in her clear, ringing voice, and the sentry—today it was Petrunichev—knowing who she was, would smile (Petrunichev's mouth was always ready to spread out in a merry smile) and answer that the lieutenant-colonel was in his office upstairs. Now she would be coming up the stairs.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Lubentsov and hurried to the door.

Tanya entered, but when she saw that he was not alone, she stopped.

"Come in, come in," repeated Lubentsov. He led her up to his desk and introduced her to the people assembled in the room who bowed politely.

Lubentsov led her to the sofa and whispered that she could sit there and listen if she wished, and if she got bored, Ksenia would show her round the premises. She whispered back that she would like to stay.

Latterly Lubentsov had conducted all his conferences with Germans without the assistance of an interpreter, but this time he spoke Russian and asked Ksenia to translate both ways. The questions discussed were the operation of a certain factory and municipal improvements. After the conference Lubentsov's subordinates came in with reports, and finally Langheinrich showed up to announce that he would begin taking over his new duties the next day. He asked Lubentsov to make a trip to Finkendorf to see the new bürgermeister he was recommending as his successor. Lubentsov was ready to leave at once and ordered the car. Tanya agreed to go with him, and as the three of them went downstairs Lubentsov was pleased to notice how the soldiers crowded at the ground-floor windows to get a glimpse of the commandant's wife.

As they drove through the city, Lubentsov drew Tanya's attention to houses whose western walls were completely covered with neat red tiles, called *Bieberschwänze*, or beavers' tails, sometimes with a tiny little window in the centre. He told her a great many things about the town and its people, about the castle, the legends of the Harz and local customs.

Every year at Whitsuntide, he said, the people of the mountain villages gather at their village commons, each bringing along a goldfinch in a cage covered with a white

cloth. Judges are elected and a contest is held to see which of the birds is the finest songster.

Some villages celebrate the Feast of the Birch-Tree. On a spring night young men plant birch-trees in front of the homes of the maidens of their choice, and the following morning the young people go into the woods to sing songs, drink wine and decorate birches with gay-coloured ribbons. Other villages observe what is called the *Grastanz*, or hay dance, at haymaking time early in August. This is the women's day. They go to the Rathaus and depose the bürgermeister for the day, electing a woman in his place. Then they lay down armfuls of hay on the square and invite the men to dance, and there is a round of polkas, waltzes, quadrilles and of course the Rheinländer. The women auction off their hay to the highest bidder, and naturally enough the prettier the seller, the higher the bids. The one who gets the highest price is elected the Festival Queen.

Langheinrich, who had already learned some Russian, smiled and nodded his head as he listened to Lubentsov.

Then Lubentsov told Tanya about the local legends—the legend of the Wild Man of the Harz with a long beard and matted hair who wore the skins of beasts and was the champion of the poor at times of danger and distress; of Heinrich the Bird-Catcher who was supposed to reign over the Harz to this day; of the knight Hackelberg, the rider of the sky, who will come to the rescue of his native parts whenever they are threatened by danger.

"Oppressed peoples," Langheinrich explained in order to put the legends on a Marxist foundation, "think up all sorts of fables to make it easier to bear their lot."

In a tiny village Rathaus, with a red-tiled roof and carved wooden figures on the eaves, Lubentsov talked with the newly-appointed bürgermeister, was present while he received some peasants who had come on various business, and took part in their conversations.

Some two hours later they returned to town. Most of the way back Tanya was silent.

"The Germans do not deserve to have commandants like you," she said at last. Lubentsov looked up in surprise. Then she went on, "In Yukhnov, where I was born, there was a German commandant in nineteen forty-one. He organized a home for Soviet children not far from the town. The children were well fed there, but their blood was taken for use at German officers' hospitals. I was told this only a few days ago by people who knew. And here you are treating the Germans as if nothing of the kind had ever happened."

"We can't treat them otherwise," Lubentsov said. "We're not fascists."

"I understand. But we must not forget."

"I don't forget, yet at times I have the strange feeling that I do. I never cease to think of these things. But I know that we are leading them along the correct path, and if they keep to that path what has been will never happen again. That is the crux of the matter."

"I love you," she said, but he did not understand why she spoke those words just then, for he was no actor and did not know wherein lay his greatest charm.

"By the way," he said, changing the subject, "did you have breakfast before leaving the house?"

"Coming to think of it, I didn't. I couldn't wait—I just had to see you. Captain Chokhov must be waiting to have lunch with us."

As soon as they got home, the three of them sat down to lunch. Conversation lagged. Chokhov spoke little, for it was an ordeal for him to behave as if nothing had happened. Tanya's gay spirits and Lubentsov's unconvincing pretence were painful to watch. The captain lost his appetite completely; he could not rid himself of the tormenting thought that he and he alone was to blame for everything.

Vorobeitsev's face still floated before his eyes and he almost groaned each time he thought of their association. Why hadn't he put the traitor out of the way when he could so easily have done so—at the hostel in Potsdam, during the hare hunt, or in his flat? But then he was not yet a traitor. Who could have thought that he was not only a snivelling nonentity, but a scoundrel and criminal to boot?

He got up, and with a muttered apology, went out.

Lubentsov did not know how to tell Tanya about what had happened. Most of all he was afraid that the malicious rumours about him and Erika Sebastian would reach her ears and that she might believe them. He searched Tanya's face, and though he smiled as if there was nothing on his mind, he could not stop wondering whether she would believe the gossip, and if she did, what she would do about it. She might simply leave him without giving him a chance to explain. He was afraid, for he felt that he did not know her well enough after all.

Tanya began unpacking. Lubentsov wanted to stop her, for she might decide to leave tomorrow—at the very best they might leave together. At the same time he enjoyed watching her lay her things about—on chairs, on the sofa, on the table. A subtle odour filled the room—the smell of perfume, comfort and home. From the way she handled her clothes, Lubentsov could see she took pleasure in pretty things, and he could understand her.

"Tanya," he said at last. "I've been having some trouble in the office."

"I felt it," she replied, turning towards him. Lubentsov was struck speechless by this simple, forthright response. She looked at him for a moment, then came over and sat beside him.

"I could see there was something on your mind, although I must say that you did a good job of acting as if nothing was wrong. You've come to be rather good at

not revealing your real feelings. If I didn't love you I might not have noticed anything."

He told her the whole story of the past few days. And finally, after a moment's struggle with himself, he told her about the suspicions of his superiors as regards his relations with Erika Sebastian.

Tanya listened without as much as a tremor passing over her face. She understood how hard it must be for him to tell her all this. Moreover, she was ready to grant that what had been said at yesterday's meeting might be true, but she did not ask him whether it was true. For even if it had been, in the circumstances it ceased to matter. The important thing was that the man she loved was in trouble; realizing the full depth of his despair, she knew she had no right to think about her own feelings. She was even slightly surprised by his agitation, for she knew that she would not ask him any questions, though under other circumstances she would have been shocked and outraged by the very possibility of his having had an affair with a German woman.

She put her arms round him, and they sat there for several minutes in silence. Then she got up and said:

"You must give careful thought to your speech today."

"I know," he said, rising. "I'll go to the office."

"No, don't do that. Go out for a walk by yourself, and think everything over."

"You're right. I'll do that."

16

It was a dull, bleak day—as dull and bleak as Lubentsov's mood. He walked down the street and before he knew it he was on the highway leading westward into the hills. Up here the wind was quite strong. Soon he reached the White Deer Inn near which he had spent that memorable first night in Lauterburg The brisk walk and

the high wind cleared his head. He went into the inn, had a beer, and in a few minutes set out to walk back to town.

The road was deserted. There were no cars or pedestrians in sight, and a deep silence rested over the countryside. Only the wind drove in angry gusts through the pines and bent the leafless hawthorn bushes in the roadside low down against the ground.

As he rounded the bend at the foot of a granite cliff towering high above the road, he saw the lonely figure of a man walking quickly ahead of him. The stranger was wearing a light black coat and hat pulled down to his ears; his trouser legs and boots were muddy. In his hand he held a long stick which he had evidently cut for himself in the woods.

The tall, lean, slightly stooping figure struck Lubentsov as familiar. In spite of the cold and the wind, the man strode ahead with a light, brisk gait. When the red roofs of Lauterburg came into sight in the valley below, the lonely wayfarer stopped and for some time gazed down at the town.

Lubentsov was certain now that he knew the man, and, quickening his steps, he caught up with him at the next bend.

It was Professor Sebastian. He had not heard Lubentsov's approach because of the howling of the wind. Lubentsov's joy equalled his surprise. But he did not call out to the professor; instead he slowed down and walked behind him for a while. The professor was now talking to himself, now humming some melody.

Lubentsov almost laughed aloud from joy. He saw now that he had been right, that by patient, persevering work one could win over people, even people of advanced years, that his talks with Sebastian, the time he had spent arguing with him, the trips he had taken with him, the patience he had displayed in their disputes, even his

"liberalism" which Kasatkin had so disapproved of—that all this had not been in vain.

His heart still beating fast, Lubentsov mentally rehearsed his greeting before speaking aloud.

"Hullo, we've met before, haven't we?"

Sebastian stopped and turned round. His face lit up in a smile.

"You're the last person I expected to meet here, and the one I wanted to see the most," he said.

"Shall we stop in the shelter of that rock? The wind's strong enough to sweep you off your feet."

"How is my daughter?"

"Very well."

"I hope you are not going to tell me that you've been following me all the way from Frankfort."

"Of course not," Lubentsov replied. "But why are you walking home? What happened?"

"My poor car seems to have given up the ghost. I had to leave it at an inn in the hills about ten kilometres from here. I was beginning to think I'd never reach Lauterburg. In general, I've had quite an adventure. I'll tell you all about it in time. Have you a cigarette on you?"

"Certainly. Shall we go? You can tell me on the way."

"I'd better leave the story until later—when I've warmed up a bit. For the present I'll just tell you that they didn't want to let me go. I had a hard time getting away. To all intents and purposes I escaped. But it's a long story."

They walked side by side. Since the road ran downhill they made very good time and soon were in Lauterburg. The castle hill was now on their left, and on the right was the former British commandant's office, now taken over for the teachers' seminar.

"I hope your trip was pleasant on the whole," said Lubentsov as he parted from the professor to hurry to his office.

"Pleasant?" the professor said, giving Lubentsov a significant look. "To tell the truth, it was more instructive than pleasant. Very instructive. I'll tell you all about it. As a matter of fact I've been looking forward to telling it to you."

He went off, and Lubentsov stood for a moment or two watching him go, then turned in the opposite direction.

My speech at tonight's meeting is just about ready, he thought.

Rounding the church, he saw before him the commandant's office and the Soviet flag flying in the wind over it. A leaden fatigue came over him as if he had just recovered from a severe illness.

Two cars stood in front of the office, waiting to take him and his colleagues to the meeting. Kasatkin, Yavorsky, Chegodayev and Menshov were standing by the cars. Voronin too was there, nervously pacing up and down the pavement, evidently worried about Lubentsov for whom he had been looking high and low.

Lubentsov could not suppress a feeling of malicious glee as he looked at Kasatkin. He had an impulse to say nothing about Sebastian before the meeting and break the sensational news during his speech. But he checked himself and turned to Menshov:

"Will you go upstairs and call up General Kuprianov to let him know that Professor Sebastian has just returned."

"The devil he has!" Chegodayev boomed and slapped Menshov on the back. "Hurry up, man!"

"I'm glad, very glad," muttered Kasatkin and his face brightened up. Yavorsky began to polish his glasses vigorously.

Menshov returned in about five minutes and said he had passed the information on to the general's aide. The general himself had been out.

They got into the cars and drove off.

The meeting was resumed. The same tension gripped the hall, and the presidium looked as grim and uncompromising as before.

As soon as he got to his seat, Lubentsov looked up at General Kuprianov and was surprised to find that his expression was still as stern and forbidding. Evidently the general had not heard the latest developments.

Indeed, General Kuprianov did not know that Sebastian had returned. He had come straight from another conference without calling at his office.

The first speaker of the evening was Leonov. He had been sitting somewhere at the back of the hall, and when his name was called he slowly made his way up front with an enigmatic smile on his lips. Slowly he climbed the steps, and on reaching the rostrum he stopped to scan the silent hall, still wearing that peculiar smile. Then he began speaking, unhurriedly, calmly, with that self-confident and slightly ironical air which audiences like so much. His low voice was not loud, but it commanded attention. He was sparing of gestures; his big hands, loosely clenched, rested in front of him, and only now and then did he lift an index finger or bring the two palms together for a fraction of a second before they came to rest once again on the rostrum.

Lubentsov watched these hands, and in each of them he seemed to see a friend that could be relied on, wise and level-headed.

"I shall begin where our esteemed comrade the colonel left off yesterday," Leonov said. "About that memorandum which he read out to us just as if it had been Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Now what is there in this memorandum to have shocked him so deeply? I would say it's pretty well written, and what's most important, the ideas expressed are all correct. I would like to copy it out for myself and be guided by some of the things in it. It's a pity Lubentsov never said a word about it to me.

But he didn't because it was a sort of diary written for himself only. And it is not customary to read people's diaries in public. At the very best they're published posthumously, and then only if written by a Pushkin or a Tolstoi and not by ordinary mortals like ourselves. Many of us here know Lubentsov. And those who don't could see by this excerpt from his diary that he is a man devoted to our cause, a man who can both think for himself and act, an irreproachably honest man. As for myself, I knew Lubentsov before I heard that excerpt. I know him and believe in him. And when a man you know and trust finds himself in trouble, it's your duty, especially if you're a Communist, to go into the matter thoroughly and soberly and help him. Is this right? But what happened with Lubentsov? Or rather, what happened in the office he heads? Owing to an oversight on the part of the personnel section, a scoundrel happened to get in. Or perhaps we should not be too harsh even with the personnel section. Is it not possible that this man became a scoundrel here in Germany, under bourgeois influences? In what respect is Lubentsov to blame? He did not see through the man in time. But then we must remember that scoundrels of this type, no matter what fools they may be otherwise, are past masters at the art of dissimulation. This we cannot deny. The lesson we must draw from the present case is that we must get to know people better, to study the people themselves and not the data in their personal files. Besides, we must learn not to give way to panic, or to lump everything together. Lubentsov has been charged here with associating with the Germans, talking to them, giving them promises. A strange accusation, and one that can spring only from wholesale distrust of people. I cannot believe that there is anybody in the world capable of making Lubentsov an enemy of our social system. On the contrary, I am certain that Lubentsov is capable of winning

many new friends for us. That is what he did. And let him continue to do so in the future. Now, what have we been doing here to Lubentsov? His very virtues have been branded as sins. Even the fact that he studies the economy of his district and German history and literature has been made to look here as something reprehensible, something that might very well have been responsible for Vorobeitsev's defection. Lubentsov writes that a commandant must be disinterested, and although we know that the cleverest man if he is mercenary cannot be a good commandant, this too is seen as nothing short of criminal. Criticism and mud-slinging are two entirely different things; we must distinguish between the two. Yet some of us confuse them. Let us not allow the scoundrel Vorobeitsev to cast his shadow over this meeting and all of us. Level-headedness is a vital quality for us. Comrade Pigarev, who never allows conceit to get the better of him, pounded the rostrum so hard with his fist that I see there is a crack here. And I tell you without pounding my fist that there is not a man among us who is more unassuming, a better comrade, more willing to help others and to ask others to help him, to advise and to seek counsel, than Comrade Lubentsov. I would like to ask the presidium: is it not time, Comrades, to let Lubentsov have his say? Otherwise the proceedings are apt to become too one-sided."

As Leonov came down from the platform the hall rocked with applause. The clapping continued for a long time in spite of the chairman's attempts to restore quiet. Lubentsov felt a sudden change in the mood of the hall after Leonov's speech in spite of the chairman's bell, the whispering in the presidium, and the surprised look on General Kuprianov's stern face.

Strictly speaking, there was no change of mood; rather it was a matter of the mood that had existed before asserting itself and breaking through the atmosphere of

intimidation, apprehension and justified indignation over the Vorobeitsev business after Leonov's frank, sober and somewhat unorthodox speech.

After Leonov three other officers took the floor. Lubentsov was quite surprised to hear them speak so strongly in his favour, for he knew them only slightly. They recalled encounters and conversations which he himself had long forgotten.

At last it was Chegodayev's turn. He was no public speaker, yet his straightforward account of the day-to-day affairs of the Lauterburg commandant's office, the work of Lubentsov and the other officers, his talks with them, Lubentsov's prestige among the Germans, and so on, proved to be more effective than the most eloquent oration. It had an effect on General Kuprianov too. He began to waver, a fact that was promptly noted by the presidium members beside him as well as by many in the hall. And this in turn impelled those who preferred to take their cue from their superiors to recast their speeches.

Lieutenant-Colonel Gorbenko was pleased with the turn in the tide. He liked Lubentsov and appreciated his work. But since he had struck quite another keynote at the beginning of the meeting and now felt somewhat ashamed of himself before Lubentsov, he persuaded himself that the sharp tone he had assumed at first had had a purely pedagogical purpose and that the meeting was shaping out exactly as had been foreseen. He passed this idea on to General Kuprianov in a whisper. The general did not see it in that light, but he did not argue the point. For the fact was that he was caught up by the new mood and was becoming more and more convinced that his newly-formed decision not to remove Lubentsov from his post as he had intended to was right. Hence, when his aide brought him the news about Professor Sebastian's return, he accepted it as further confirmation of the correctness of the view that had crystallized among the of-

ficers in the hall, of the truth which had been brought out by democratic procedure through free exchange of opinions, even if some of the speakers, quite understandably incensed by the Vorobeitsev scandal, had levelled some unjustified accusations at Lubentsov in the heat of the controversy. On the other hand, the comrades who had taken up the cudgels in Lubentsov's behalf, praised him too much and sought to exonerate him completely, which was not right either.

What had to be found was the golden mean. General Kuprianov, who spoke immediately after Chegodayev, supplied it. On the whole the general was fair. Everybody in the hall felt grateful to him. And he himself was very pleased with his speech.

Then Lubentsov spoke. It was a passionate speech that came straight from the heart. Taking full responsibility for the Vorobeitsev incident, he criticized those who saw no difference between vigilance and suspicion. He had unshakable faith in his comrades and the aspirations, common-sense and future of the German working folk, he said. Without this fundamental faith, the difficult mission of the Soviet man and Communist wholly dedicated to his convictions in a world torn by contradictions would be pointless.

17

Sebastian waited in vain for Lubentsov that evening. He was disappointed, for having had a good rest after his journey he was impatient to see the commandant and tell him all he had seen and experienced during his visit to the West.

Moreover, Sebastian felt that if he had been able to learn anything from his trip it was largely thanks to Lubentsov. It was his association with the Russian commandant and their tours of the Lauterburg district that

had taught him the apparently simple yet difficult art of mixing with the common people, talking with them, listening to them and understanding them.

Without this valuable experience he would have seen only that which Walter and Walter's friends who came to see him in his son's country villa in Frankfort on the Main wanted him to see.

Yes, he had learned something from this Russian officer. Walter had been amazed by his father's energy and vigour, his lengthy interviews with all sorts of people, the long walks he liked to take in the town and its environs, with frequent stops to chat with workingmen, shopkeepers, peasants and anyone else he happened to meet. Walter had never known his father to be so sociable and to display what he considered an abnormal taste for hobnobbing with the crowd. But the professor only laughed at his son's dismay and continued to study life in the Western zone by Herr Lubentsov's and not Herr Sebastian Junior's methods.

Yet it was not only his association with Lubentsov that helped Sebastian to obtain a clear idea of the situation. He learned a great deal also from Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas, an American officer to whom Walter had introduced him in Frankfort. Sebastian and the American took to each other at once and spent many pleasant hours together during the professor's stay in the city.

Douglas, a man of much wit and charm, with the frame of a giant and the eyes of a child, shared the views of the late President Roosevelt and did not hide his opinions either from Sebastian or from his chiefs. The latter were a little afraid of his frankness, his brilliant mind, his broad erudition and his sharp tongue. He and his immediate colleagues had earned the respect even of their opponents, who recognized that the "Douglas group" were the ablest members of the Military Government. Douglas combined an exhaustive knowledge of the Ger-

man problem with the imagination and perspicacity of a top-rate newspaper reporter.

He did not hide from Sebastian that he was strongly opposed to the policy pursued by the United States in Germany, and he gave the professor a brief glimpse of what went on behind the scenes.

At the parties which Walter arranged to enable his father to meet his friends, the prevailing mood was one of hope, even confidence, that the big German industrialists would be able with the help of the Americans to clear themselves of the "insane accusations" levelled against them and regain their rightful place in the rapacious fraternity of Big Business.

Walter himself was enraptured by the Americans. He affected many American expressions which jarred unpleasantly on Professor Sebastian's ear, reminding him of a trip he made to Egypt some fifteen years before. The cab drivers in Alexandria also spoke a jargon consisting of words gleaned from all the languages of the world. It smacked of the colonies and the professor with his sensibility and good taste winced to hear it.

Incidentally, Walter's raptures struck his father somehow as not altogether sincere. He often came home from work looking gloomy and depressed.

The professor met dozens of German bankers and manufacturers who only recently were believed to have been put entirely out of the running, but who now had regained their former self-assurance.

It was no longer a secret that the people who mattered in the American Military Government were for rehabilitation, and that the watchword of Brigadier-General William Draper Jr., who headed the economic division, was "First rehabilitation, then reform." Military Government's German advisers deliberately painted the gloomiest picture they could of the condition of German industry, making it appear that denazification as stipulated

in the Potsdam agreement would lead to complete stagnation, paralysis of the transport services and complete collapse of all economic life inasmuch as it amounted to depriving industry of its most capable executives.

Yet the type of information supplied by the advisers was not the crux of the matter. More important was the fact that Clay, Draper and other top men in American Military Government were tycoons of Big Business, bankers or industrialists representing U.S. concerns which had long had a substantial interest in German industry. These men had long been associated with German big capital and by virtue of this earned the reputation of experts on Germany and German economy. Hardly anybody even tried to hide this fact. Indeed, the American administrators were as often as not nothing but financial moguls in military uniform.

All this Sebastian came to realize very soon, and his talks with Douglas helped to complete the picture.

Douglas did not conceal his disappointment and indignation. The latest developments were not to his taste, and he had no use whatever for Draper.

"The late president would turn over in his grave if he could see what's happening," he said. "I'm retiring. Come what may, I'm going home."

One day Douglas drove Sebastian some seventy kilometres from town to see a camp for German refugees from the eastern districts of the country. The poverty of these people shocked the professor. They did not even have kitchen utensils and cooked their food in tin cans. Most of them had no employment. Rumour-mongers were hard at work among them and there was talk that they would soon be able to return to their old homes east of the Oder and the Neisse. When would that be? As soon as the Russians and the Poles were chased out. And who would do that? The usual answer to that was a significant grin.

With a wry smile Douglas told Sebastian that the

American commandants in the towns and larger villages behaved like minor potentates. Generally unprepared to shoulder the responsibilities involved, they were out just to have as good a time as they could. Actually they did whatever the pretty young German girls they lived with told them to. And since most of these young ladies came from the privileged sections of society, it was these that the commandants backed and showered with benefits at the expense of the rest of the population.

This made Sebastian think of Lubentsov and Erika. He had a good idea of the state of affairs between the Soviet commandant and his daughter, and though he sympathized with Erika, he admired Lubentsov for his self-control and high sense of duty. The thought of Erika made him feel nostalgic and he decided to return home as soon as he could.

By this time the anti-Soviet element in the Western zones no longer concealed its sentiments. At least this was the case with the circles Walter belonged to. Everywhere there were organizations, bureaus, agencies and what not representing various governments overthrown in the East. Displaced persons, people without professions or definite occupations, ex-politicians and lawyers, the scum of the Warsaw, Prague and Lvov night-club world, Ukrainian fascists, Croat Ustashi, and followers of Tiso, the Slovak dictator—men and women without a country, traitors and criminals—filled scores of camps where they were fed and sheltered.

Sebastian thought of the future with horror, wondering where it all would lead, and whether the day would really come when the war-time allies broke with one another. If that happened—woe to Germany, a Germany split into two, for it would again be in danger of becoming the theatre of the bloodiest of wars.

One evening Walter brought up the old idea of the professor's moving to the American zone. Once again he

enumerated all the advantages accruing to him from such a step.

"Why don't you write to Erika," he said. "We'll have the letter delivered by a reliable person and arrange to have her come over. Your library and everything else of value can also be brought here."

"But I don't want to move," Sebastian said. "I'd rather stay at home. Times will change. There'll be a peace treaty and Germany will be united."

"Do you really believe that?" Walter said rather sadly. "Can't you see that nothing of the kind can ever happen now?"

"I don't know about that. As for you, you're always praising things here. But what have you got to brag about? The fact that nothing's going to change? Or that the nazis are crawling out of their holes and clearing themselves of Hitlerite contamination by paying a fine of a thousand marks? Or that the junkers are again in possession of the big estates? Or that the people who put Hitler in power are again coming out in the open as if nothing had changed in the world? Or that the American officers and bankers who despise the German people are making overtures to the German bankers? Or that nazism is being declared a popular movement and our industrialists innocent lambs? On our side they are at least experimenting, making a sincere effort to uproot nazism. Over there the nazis won't find shelter, now or in the future, and they know that perfectly well. On that side an attempt is being made to give the anti-fascists a chance to play the leading role.... I don't know how it's going to end, whether Soviet policy is going to succeed or not, but at least they are trying to do something. You must forgive me, Walter, but that's my opinion and I have no intention of changing my mind."

"So you want to go back to Lauterburg," Walter said, adding as if it were an afterthought, "I can see you're a

bigger patriot than the Russians themselves. There's a Russian officer from Lauterburg here just now. He ran away from that paradise on earth."

Sebastian merely shrugged his shoulders in reply. He was glad he had spoken his mind.

The next day he was given proof that Walter had been right about the Russian officer. Going down the street he saw on the opposite pavement three G.I.s and a man in a Russian army greatcoat without insignia and a uniform cap with an unfaded spot on the fabric in front where the five-pointed star had been. The face struck him as familiar; he was certain he knew that lean figure with the loose swagger, those sunken beady eyes and that big, fleshy nose.

Sebastian started. Could that be the captain from the Lauterburg commandant's office, he wondered.

Vorobeitsev recognized Sebastian. He stopped, turned pale, and took a step back. Then, drawing the wrong conclusion from Sebastian's presence in Frankfort, he lapsed back into his usual manner.

"Hullo, Professor! You here too?" he shouted.

The professor winced as if struck in the face, quickened his pace and slipped round the next corner.

Next morning Major Collins came to see Walter. Sebastian saw him go into the study, running his fingers over the objects within reach as he went. When Walter and Collins came out two hours later their faces were set and grim.

"You can't go back," Walter said to his father.

"Why?" Sebastian asked, rising slowly. "Am I under arrest?"

"Of course not," Collins put in. "You did not understand us. What we want to say is that it is in your own interests to remain here. You see, there have been rather serious developments in Lauterburg. The commandant and your daughter have been arrested. You can't go back."

Sebastian stared at him. He wanted to reply, but decided against it and sank back into his chair.

"We'll see that your daughter gets away," Collins went on. "You don't have to worry. Everything will work out satisfactorily."

"Good," Sebastian said resignedly.

That night he slipped out of the house and into the garage. After emptying the petrol tank of Walter's car into his own he drove off.

It was not that he disbelieved the report of Erika's arrest, on the contrary, it was because he thought it quite possible that he made up his mind to return. Collins had made a mistake.

18

When Professor Sebastian turned away from him in the street, Vorobeitsev swore and continued on his way with the three young, good-looking, easy-going Americans who now accompanied him wherever he went.

On the whole Vorobeitsev enjoyed being in the limelight. He gave several press conferences and made the rounds of the radio stations and newspaper offices. Renegade Russians came to see him at his hotel to ask him to help them get fixed up in jobs. He spouted all kinds of nonsense and people believed or pretended to believe him. He was given money in occupation marks and dollars and permitted to go to the American officers' club where one could always have a gay time and meet German girls, who, incidentally, were examined by American venereologists before they were admitted. He was promised a trip—something like a speaking tour—through the United States and South America. He said he wanted to go to Paris, and that too was promised. True, the trips were constantly being put off, and once when he got insistent about it the American lieutenant who had been put in charge of him ignored him completely. White, whom he saw a couple of times, patted him on the

shoulder, praised him for his "courageous and resolute step" and looked at him with his staring, expressionless eyes.

Vorobeitsev quickly made friends with the three Americans detailed to escort him. They were rather simple fellows who regarded him as a sort of a cinema star, and seemed to be proud of acting as his bodyguard.

He found it hardest of all to be left alone. Fear gripped him. He imagined that in Altstadt, Halle, Berlin and Moscow conferences were being held on how to put him out of the way. Besides, he had begun to have strange hallucinations, especially when he went to bed at night—he would see before him a broad-featured human face with a black beard and a bloody streak running all the way down the right cheek. And he would toss about unable to fall asleep, racking his memory to place that face and explain why it was pursuing him. He knew he had seen it somewhere, but when and under what circumstances he could not remember.

He took to sitting up late at night, and drank heavily, but no matter how late he went to bed the dream was there to haunt him.

After the encounter with Sebastian, he and his escort went into a bar and had a whisky each. Vorobeitsev paid. He always did.

One of the Americans, a fair-haired tough whom the others called Mike, said in German (they all spoke German quite well):

"Edith's got a show on tonight."

"How about going there?" said another. His name was Tom. He was dark and of the phlegmatic kind, and he hailed from Missouri, "the same state as President Truman," as he sometimes bragged.

The third of the trio, Bill, a red-haired giant with a permanent grin on his face, thought it was an excellent idea.

"Of course we'll go," Vorobeitsev brightened up and called for a second round of whiskies.

Bill, looking at Vorobeitsev with his customary smile, suddenly lifted his right foot and brought down the cleated heel of his boot on the Russian's chrome-leather toe. He did it on the spur of the moment without the slightest reason, because he wanted to, and because he knew Vorobeitsev could not repay him in kind. It was a blow struck at a man who had no country to back him, a man who had lost the last vestige of human dignity. The fact that the brutal, unwarranted, treacherous act made no impression on the other Americans, who continued to exchange witticisms with the same air of studied boredom, brought it home to Vorobeitsev, now trembling with humiliation, that he was all alone, an outcast without a friend in the world. The same realization was written in the cynical grin on Bill's face, and on the faces of his pals, whose boredom was perhaps even more terrifying than the red-headed G.I.'s sneer.

Vorobeitsev knew then that he alone had to put up with this injury which no man in the world should, or would, take lying down. In a flash he saw that there would be no easy life for him, and no travelling, and that soon he would be just another outcast among others like him. He remembered now whose face it was that haunted him. The blood-stained features and the eyes filled with terror had belonged to the traitor whom he had seen killed slowly and inexpertly by the infuriated crowd on the road between Wittenberg and Halle seven months before.

19

On his way to Lauterburg after his car had broken down, Professor Sebastian stopped in a wayside village to rest. The peasants recognized him at once, for he had been there several times before with Lubentsov.

It was a holiday and the professor stopped for a while to watch the dancing. Then he went into a crowded pub where he shared a table with a young couple who were holding hands. They were a fine, healthy-looking pair with pink cheeks and red, work-roughened hands. They were obviously very much in love.

Remembering the anti-Soviet talk he had heard in Walter's house and the criticism of the Soviet Military Administration and Soviet policy in Germany in general, Sebastian got into conversation with the young couple who were soon telling him about themselves and their plans for the future.

Both said they were satisfied with their life and were planning to enrol next year at the two-year preparatory courses for young workers and peasants in Halle in order to enter University. They spoke about the land reform with the enthusiasm of new converts and were all for the new way of life that was asserting itself in these parts.

Professor Sebastian was deeply impressed by what he heard. As he contrasted the views of these two young people to those of Walter and his friends, he could not but marvel, with all his experience and erudition, at the vastly different approaches people could have to one and the same issue.

The morning after his return a number of friends came to see him, and he told them about his trip to Frankfort. The visitors included several of Erika's new friends, among them the clever and intelligent Frau Wisetzki. The commandant too called, bringing with him Tanya and Captain Yavorsky. Erika who went to meet them as they came in cast a quick glance at Tanya and flushed crimson. Tanya too blushed. Lubentsov introduced the two women to each other and said he hoped they would be friends. Neither said a word.

"Erika," said Professor Sebastian, noticing the awkward silence, "I think we ought to have some coffee."

When the coffee had been served, the professor continued his story. He told it brilliantly—moved perhaps by the silent drama that had been played out before his eyes—describing with scintillating humour the people that frequented Walter's drawing-room, and speaking of his admiration for Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas and his friends. Then he gave an account of his meeting with the young man and woman in the village pub.

"As I compare the opinions which your supporters and your enemies have of you—the warmth and affection of the former and the hatred and complaints of the latter—I cannot help thinking of an all but forgotten fable by Heinse," he said, turning to Lubentsov. "A waxen idol standing beside a fire where pottery was being baked began to melt. 'Why are you so cruel to me,' the idol addressed the fire, 'to pottery you impart strength but me you destroy.' The fire replied, 'You have only your own nature to blame. I am always the same.' You too, Herr Oberstleutnant, must always remain true to yourself, bringing joy to noble clay and striking fear in the hearts of the waxen idols of all shades and hues."

Lubentsov was deeply moved, and so was Tanya, to whom Yavorsky translated what the professor said. Soon they took leave of their host and left.

That evening the soldiers of the commandant's platoon gave their first amateur concert. All evening long the hall rocked with laughter and the sound of the merriment carrying out into the street caused passers-by to stop and listen. Going over to a window with Tanya and Chokhov, Lubentsov saw the curious throng outside, which melted as soon as the people caught a glimpse of "Oberstleutnant Davai" looking at them.

"We must organize a theatre in town," Lubentsov said. "Can't put it off any longer."

Tanya and Chokhov went back into the hall, leaving Lubentsov alone at the window. Watching the lights

being turned on in the city, Lubentsov realized that the incredible had happened—he had fallen in love with Lauterburg, its streets and gardens, the paving stones of its squares, its tiled roofs and old alleys, the green hills round it and the people—most of them, but certainly not all—inhabiting it.

"Only don't you ever think of attacking us again," he said aloud as he looked at the glittering lights of the town. "Remember that. Or the next time not a stone of you will survive. I shall be the first to give the order to open fire!"

Then before his mind's eye the faces of the new friends he had found here passed in review—sincere, straightforward and hard-working friends—and he banished the very thought of war. His mind turned to other things. Behind him he heard a burst of applause, and he returned to the hall and his soldiers.

In the summer of 1947 the Soviet Military Administration in Germany granted Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov's request and gave him leave to return home in order to enrol at the Frunze Military Academy. Tanya and he were accompanied on the way back by Sergeant-Major Voronin, who had been demobilized, and Sergeant Veretennikov, who was going home on furlough.

It was decided to go to Halle by car and to take the train from there. And so, after having said good-bye to all their friends, both Russian and German, they set out early one morning.

In the outskirts of Lauterburg Lubentsov stopped the car outside a small shop with all kinds of metal articles in the show-window in order to buy some souvenir. Inside he was recognized and there was quite a stir behind the counter. The proprietor himself—a little grey-haired man wearing a leather apron—appeared and hurried to serve him.

"For you I have something special," he said when Lu-

bentsov had told him what he wanted. He disappeared at the back of the shop and after quite some time returned with shining eyes and laid down on the counter two wrought-silver goblets of unusually fine workmanship with a design depicting the Witches' Dance on Brocken.

"It's pretty," said Lubentsov.

"I made it myself," said the old man.

An old woman, evidently the proprietor's wife, nodded.

"It's a sample of our local handicrafts," the old man continued, smiling, and hurried to bring up a chair. "Won't you sit down, Herr Kommandant."

"Thanks, but I haven't the time," Lubentsov said. "Local handicraft work, you say?"

"Yes, it's an ancient craft in these parts."

Lubentsov paid for the goblets and hurried out, thinking that if he ever again became a commandant of a town he'd take an interest in the handicrafts too. "It's a pity I overlooked it completely," he said to himself. "And that's probably not my only oversight."

He smiled. He felt a little sad, as one always feels on leaving a place where so much of one's moral and physical energy has been invested.

As he was getting into the car he heard someone call to him. Looking round he saw a buxom woman coming towards him. She was wearing a red sweater and oilcloth apron, and there was a huge wart on her face.

"Oh, Herr Kommandant," she cried, beaming, "I am so glad to see you. I hope you still remember me. If you only knew what I have to tell you." She produced a newspaper folded in four from an apron pocket. "I would like you to see this. My article about some of our local shortcomings. You've probably forgotten that you advised me to write to the papers. But I didn't." She laughed uproariously. "Now I spend my evenings writing to the papers. Herr Bürgermeister Vorländer is scared of me."

Lubentsov joined her hearty laughter and shook her

hand with a warmth she probably did not quite understand since she did not know that he was leaving for good. Then he got into the car.

And now they were homeward bound, journeying by train from West to East, past the familiar German landscape, past towns still lying in ruins but showing signs of revival, through Poland now rising from the ashes of destruction.

At last they were in Byelorussia. Here too traces of war—grass-grown trenches and dug-outs, bomb craters filled with water—still marred the landscape. Yet here too the land was coming back to life. Brand-new log cabins had made their appearance on the sites of burned-out villages. The grain was ripening in the fields, and stacks of hay stood in the meadows. True, life was still grim, for the war had left deep furrows on the face of this land.

Lubentsov, Tanya and their companions could not take their eyes from the swiftly changing scene outside the train window. As Western Europe receded, the memory of their life there gradually faded and new impressions crowded in. At the same time, their minds were not at rest for they knew how complicated the world situation was; the charged atmosphere of Europe was only too familiar to them; the red-faced prowler and his accomplices were still at large. But now, looking at the boundless vistas of their native landscape, Lubentsov and his comrades were more than ever convinced that their prime task was to build up their country, to work for the happiness and prosperity of their own people, for after all everything else depended on that.

Lubentsov, his wife and friends were journeying back, as it were, into the past by almost the same route they had travelled to the West. But being older in years and richer in experience they were able more fully to ap-

preciate the grandeur and significance of their country. And each of them in his heart pledged a solemn vow to love that country and strive for it more than ever. They were returning to the smaller, familiar world of their own personal experience which they had left behind, yet they felt that it had grown immeasurably greater than it had seemed before, and they realized it was only through one's own immediate world that one can fully understand and appreciate the greater world of all mankind.

And as the train bore them swiftly across the boundless Russian plains their hearts were filled with peace and gladness.

Shortly before they reached Gomel, Veretennikov suddenly began collecting his belongings.

"I think I'll get out here," he announced.

"How's that?" cried Voronin. "You said you were going to Ivanovo."

"No, I've got to stop here. Got to see someone," the other mumbled in confusion.

"An affair of the heart, eh?" Voronin pressed him.

"Could call it that."

He said good-bye to Lubentsov and Tanya, jotted down Voronin's address, shouldered his kit-bag and got off. Long after the train had left he stood on the little platform inhaling the rich aroma of the earth. Then, remembering something, he rummaged in his pocket, pulled out a slip of paper—the receipt for the hay—laughed aloud, tore it up and threw it away, then set off down the village street.

The train sped on, carrying Lubentsov, Tanya and Voronin ever farther eastward. The trees flashing past the carriage window cast dappled shadows over the compartment.

TWO LETTERS

1

Dear Comrade Meshchersky,

Greetings from an old friend, Major Chokhov. I am in the Transcaucasus now, in command of a battalion. Do you ever see any of our old friends? I have lost touch with them all. I hear that Comrade Lubentsov is in Moscow. My wife Ksenia Andreyevna sends you her regards. She works in our army library. She has a very high opinion of your poetry. She says her readers like it very much. We have a daughter now named Tanya.

With Victory Day greetings,

Yours truly,

V. Chokhov

May 9, 1950

2

My dear Vasily Maximovich,

It was very good of you to write to me. Your letter reminded me of old times and gave me much pleasure.

Lieutenant-Colonel Lubentsov is in Moscow but I see him rarely for he is always very busy. He is in his last year at the Frunze Military Academy. He and his wife rent

a room near Zubovsky Square. Tatyana Vladimirovna works in their district polyclinic. They have a son now, called Volodya, and they seem to be very happy.

When I first went to see them and walked down the long corridor in the flat where Lubentsov lives, I could not help thinking how many other war heroes and leaders of men who could cope with tasks of any magnitude were doing some modest job, in Moscow and all over the country, and doing it conscientiously and well. And I thought: these are the men who can perform miracles when the need arises.

General Sereda has retired. He lives in the Ukraine now. His daughter is studying in Moscow University.

Voronin works at a shoe factory in Ivanovo. He is married now and has two children, I believe.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Sasha Meshchersky